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Abstract

This is a study of an unusual kind of mahdist and/ or Islamic millenarian movement, the Mahdiyya movement, which emerged in Ijebuland, south-western Nigeria in January 1942. The movement is unusual in several important respects: in its pacifism - mahdist movements wherever they are found tending to advocate jihad of the sword as the principal means of attaining their goal; in the extent to which it combined the restorative and the retributive ethos; in its irenic attitude toward Christianity, and in its aim, which was essentially the creation of a "new religion of the spirit" that would transcend religious divisions, in contrast with the usual mahdist preoccupation, the complete restoration of Islam per se.

The principal tenet of the movement expresses this irenic spirit: a true Muslim or Christian is one who knows, meditates upon and gives equal weight and respect to the Bible and the Qur'an and to the prophets Jesus and Muhammad. The Mahdiyya, a revitalization movement, adapted a number of Christian rites including marriage and encouraged the integration of Islamic and western education to meet the needs of a small but growing number of younger more westernised Muslims.

The crisis of royal legitimacy that followed on the imposition by the British colonial administration of the "Sole Native Authority" system in 1916 was perhaps the most important immediate cause of Mahdism in Ijebuland. It left this once tightly structured and firmly governed kingdom leaderless and directionless providing the opening for the Mahdi-Messiah whose apocalyptic predictions were given added significance by epidemics and wars, and in particular World War II.

The response to the claims and the message of the self-proclaimed Mahdi-Messiah, Muhammad Jumat Imam, varied. The reaction of the colonial administration, always nervous about Mahdism, was hostile as was that of the Muslim, Christian, apart from the Ijebu Aladura, and Traditional leaders. The popular response, although by no means uniform, was much more enthusiastic, especially among Ijebu women. Many of the Mahdi-Messiah's followers were indeed women and they were attracted by what they referred to as his "good character", while this charismatic leader's male followers were impressed by his claim to be the divinely appointed black prophet and saviour of Africa. But all, even those who rejected his claims, admired this largely self educated prophet's learning and gift of "divine knowledge".

As to the social composition of the Mahdiyya, the movement contained some who were destitute and for whom society made little if any provision. Many followers, furthermore, were people in that unhappy position of being unable, for emotional, psychological, and religious reasons, to belong wholly to the traditional world and yet were ill equipped and without the means to embrace the new order. Ijebu Mahdism was, therefore, a system of support and leadership for those left alone and helpless by poverty. But, it was also an attempt by people living in a new religious, political, economic and social context, and whose traditional cosmology no longer worked as effectively as it once did, to understand and come to grips with the growth of individualism and the waning of community-based morality, with a pluri-confessional society, with the new idioms and new assumptions that colonialism had generated, and to control and harness the two edged sword of modernization.

The Mahdiyya, which splintered on the death of its founder in 1959 over the interrelated questions of inheritance and the right of a woman to be the overall leader of the movement, provided many who lived on the margins of the old and new worlds and would otherwise have been left to digest change in its raw, naked state, with an ideology that enabled them to cope with the transition to modernity, and in this and other respects it can be compared and contrasted, as is the case in the conclusion to this study, not only with other Nigerian and West African mahdist movements but also with Christian-inspired messianic movements, and with Marxism's approach to change.

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Introduction and Methodological Note

As Cohn noted, millenarian movements see "salvation" as collective, terrestrial, imminent, total and miraculous and this picture is broad enough to cover, with certain qualifications, the Mahdiyya movement of Ijebuland in south-western Nigeria, the main subject of this research.[1]

In origin a Shi'ite belief Mahdism found its way into Sunni or orthodox Islam very early on.[2] Although the Qur'an makes no specific reference to the Mahdi or God-guided one, such an idea has, nevertheless, played a central role in popular Muslim thought for centuries. The Arabic historian, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), described it as a belief found among the common people in every epoch.[3]

It was this belief that perhaps more than any other was to shape the modern history of Islam in Nigeria and West Africa as a whole where, in the nineteenth century, it was to become:

> "an irresistible force giving rise to jihad in Islam".[4]

Very much earlier, in fact by the late fifteenth century, the mahdist idea had emerged as an integral element of West African Muslim thought and there, as elsewhere, it became closely interwoven with the notion of the Mujaddid, the renewer and / or regenerator of Islam.

The belief in the Mahdi and the Mujaddid have served many purposes in the course of Islamic history one of the more important being the creation of group solidarity or to use Ibn Khaldun's phrase, "asabiyya." As to the mahdist/ renewal responses to the problem of "evil" this has been essentially restorative: the present immoral, unjust age must be brought to an end and true peace, harmony and justice established by the return to the Golden Age of Islam, the age of the first four caliphs. Seen from this perspective mahdist movements, to confine the discussion to them, might best be classified as utopian in that they see "salvation" as belonging to those who join their community and actively engage in the

struggle to construct or, more accurately, reconstruct a perfect society free from evil.[5] Although mahdist movements did not always begin violently few if any in principle ever renounced jihad of the sword as a means to attaining their goal which, as just noted, was almost always the restoration of the Golden Age of Islam, and, as Gibb pointed out, the same holds for virtually all "puritanical" Muslim movements with or without a mahdist dimension.[6] Sometimes mahdist movements were also protests against social, economic and political injustice, as were Christian inspired messianic movements both in Africa and elsewhere, but they differed from the latter and, as will be seen in the conclusion to this study, from secular, socialist millenarian movements inspired by Marxism.

The Mahdiyya movement of Ijebuland, while sharing much in common with that Mahdism found in Nigeria, West Africa and the Muslim world as a whole - and, as will be seen, with Christian inspired messianic movements and secular, Marxist brands of utopianism - was, nevertheless, Mahdism with a difference in that, among other things, it disowned violence as a means to achieve its aims. Moreover, rather than looking back single-mindedly to the reconstruction of a Golden Age of Islam in order to remain there it sought to return to Islam's origins for the purpose of unearthing the doctrinal basis for the creation of a new "religion of the spirit" in which Christians and Muslims, without apostatising, could worship together. In this and other respects the Mahdiyya not only combined to an unusual degree the restorative and retributive ethos and offered people an insight into the glorious future of peace and tranquility that lay ahead but also provided them with an explanation of how their society, bereft of any social unity and ideological cohesion, might be healed and of their place in God's plan of salvation as the people chosen to bring peace to Ijebuland, Nigeria and indeed the world.

The millenarianism of the Mahdiyya, although its achievements in terms of bringing lasting peace and harmony to the wider society were perhaps at best extremely modest, was no vague and empty form of protest, nor was it another example of what Douglas refers to

as millenarian "tragedy".[7] Not only does every movement of this kind at the very least carry within it the guarantee of creative truth for its participants but also, as just noted, the Mahdiyya enabled many people to absorb the more momentous, large scale political, economic and cultural changes taking place which in their raw, naked state would otherwise have been indigestible. It also enabled individuals to come to grips with some of their personal fears and anxieties and spiritual and economic problems some of which were as much the creation of the traditional interpretation of the world and way of doing things as they were the result of the imposition of a new order by colonialism.

Its unusual features alone and in particular its pacifist, non-violent approach would in themselves make the Mahdiyya worthy of attention for Thrupp's observation of almost thirty years ago still remains true at least in the case of Islamic millenarianism if not more widely:

> "As it happens the single most serious deficiency in our knowledge of millenial movements relates to those types that have not produced very clear cut doctrines nor extremist leaders, that is those movements whose members are content to await the consummation of their hopes quietly."[8]

While it is by no means the only example of quietistic Islam in Nigerian or West African Islamic history, as chapter one of this study makes clear, the Mahdiyya's renunciation of jihad makes it a rare form of Islamic millenarianism in these or any other settings and therefore of considerable theoretical interest.

The Mahdiyya movement is also of theoretical interest for a variety of other reasons including the following: the ingenious way in which it made millenarianism serve as an instrument for the creation of social solidarity in a once closely integrated but later deeply divided society and a society in which belief in traditional values had been seriously challenged by Western education and by Islam and Christianity; how, in this context, millenarianism, through the movement, came to function as an ideology for change; the comparisons it enables one to make between a Mahdist response to change and that of

certain Christian and secular messianic movements in the African context; and the opportunity it provides for comparing and contrasting charismatic leaders from different religious backgrounds - in this case from the Muslim, Old Testament, Christian and African Traditional religious backgrounds. Moreover, the fact that the Mahdiyya offered the possibility of observing why and how people decide to change the direction of their lives and built new communities was also a strong attraction.

There was, furthermore, the challenge of providing an explanation for this particular Mahdist phenomenon, so unlike most other outbreaks of Islamic millenarianism, particularly in its pacifism and in its irenic approach to Christianity, and of offering a general account of Mahdism in Nigeria and West Africa as a whole. In the latter case although emphasis has been placed on a number of causal factors in this study two such appear to have been of the utmost significance: the realization by Muslim reformers, most of whom were teachers, that Mahdism was a powerful means of creating "asabiyya" and of galvanizing support for their campaigns to purify Islam; and, as in Medieval Europe,[9] the marginalization and deprivation consequent upon the widespread absence of formal institutional provision for those caught in the trap of poverty, especially that "conjunctural" poverty resulting from such misfortunes as climatic and political insecurity or shortage of land, or one of a number of forms of organismic deprivation.[10]

In the case of the Mahdiyya these factors were likewise present alongside others of equal if not even greater significance: first of all the contact with colonialism and following on this the undermining of the principle of legitimation that had been in use from "time immemorial" to justify the power of command of the traditional ruler or awujale (king) of Ijebuland. In a very general sense colonialism itself brought this about. However, it was only when the policy of "Indirect Rule" in the form of the "Sole Native Authority" system was introduced by the colonial regime that it became absolutely clear to most ordinary people that the "Old Order" was to be systematically dismantled. Henceforth, there was to

be domination without legitimacy which in effect came to mean the complete absence of any lawful authority in Ijebuland, leaving it directionless and wide open to charismatic domination. All of this created a potential pool of Mahdists particularly though by no means exclusively among the poor who had lost faith in the "old order" but who were without the means and the skills to make a satisfying life in the rapidly emerging new society.

The study of the Mahdiyya, finally, provided an opportunity to develop and qualify the general picture of Mahdism and Islamic millenarianism in the Nigerian and West African setting.

As to the structure of this study this has been shaped by a number of considerations not the least of which are methodological. In order to be able to identify the place occupied by the Mahdiyya in the history of Islamic millenarianism in Nigeria in particular but also in West Africa and highlight its own special contribution to that history chapter one of this study provides an overview of the origins of the idea itself, its entry into West African Islamic thought and its development and application there over the centuries.

If prophets are to communicate, make an impression, acquire a following they must speak in a language and behave in ways that are intelligible and familiar to their listeners. For this reason chapter two which describes the local, Ijebu context to which the mahdist notion was applied from 1942-1959 by Muhammad Jumat Imam, founder of the Mahdiyya, provides background material on the beliefs and general outlook of the Ijebu indispensable for an understanding of the response to the millenarian ideas of this self-proclaimed Mahdi-Messiah. Chapter three develops the point previously mentioned concerning how the crisis of royal legitimacy came to be largely responsible for the millenarian milieu that emerged in the 1930s, emphasising that authority or domination involves a reciprocal relationship between ruler and ruled and one in which the obedience of the latter is to some degree determined by the notion that those who command constitute part of a legitimate form of

authority. Once this belief is undermined or destroyed, as was the case in Ijebuland with the introduction of the "Sole Native Authority" system, then stability is greatly endangered.

Chapter four traces the path taken by the Mahdiyya's founder, Muhammad Jumat Imam, from reformer to prophet, examining his public behaviour and activities, his standing in and links with the wider Muslim community and with Christians and Traditionalists, his private self revealed in his dreams and visions recorded in his diaries, and his motivation for declaring himself the Mahdi of the Muslims and the Messiah of the Christians.

The form and content of the "New Jerusalem" which he inaugurated before a gathering of about one thousand Ijebu on January 2nd 1942 is described chapter five. The central idea was the union, on the basis of the fundamental beliefs which they shared, of the two principal protagonists, the Muslims and Christians, in a new "religion of the spirit" which would transcend all division and strife. This "new heaven" was symbolised in the Temple of the New Jerusalem or Mosjidi Zahir, cruciform in structure with a minaret situated on the right side of its sloping roof, and in the Ark of the Covenant containing bound copies of the Bible and the Qur'an, both declared to be of equal standing as sources of divine revelation.

Also a set of commandments was laid down which, while its preamble attributed the problems of the world in the conventional way to moral causes, was in content strikingly private, personal and subjective with a great deal of emphasis on motive and intention, thus, reflecting, perhaps, the transition from a tightly knit, closely-bound traditional society to a much more open, individualistic one.

Chapter six considers the nature of charismatic authority and attempts to make comparisons and contrasts between the Mahdi-Messiah, Weber's Biblical prophet and the Traditional African prophet as described by Evans-Pritchard. It then looks in detail at the response, both official and popular, to the claims made by the Mahdi-Messiah and at his alleged insanity. At the official level the Mahdiyya, as with every other previous outbreak of Mahdism, gave

rise to a degree of anxiety mixed with a certain disdain and incredulity, while at the popular level it was much more diverse and positive, especially from women who were given considerable status within the movement.

We also witness here as in chapter five the paradox of a charismatic leader who compels allegiance as a creator or generator of order rather than simply as one who roots up and pulls down. But the Mahdi-Messiah did break with the past in various ways by, for example, appointing the second of his wives, Alhaja Rahmatu, not only as his deputy which would have been within the bounds of convention and therefore acceptable, but also as his successor.

As chapter seven shows, this decision was respected until his death in 1959 when schism ensued, provoked not only by the reluctance of many members to accept a woman as overall leader but also by matters of inheritance. This chapter also provides an account of the expansion of the movement, its social composition, and the process of institutionalization which set in after the death of the founder who, nevertheless, like the ancestor in traditional society, has continued to "rule" from the grave.

These are the broad outlines of the Mahdiyya movement's history, method and aims, which in chapter eight, the conclusion to this study, are compared and contrasted with those of other mahdist movements, other forms of Muslim protest movement, Christian-inspired messianic movements and Marxist utopian movements. The distinctive features of the Mahdiyya are also singled out in this chapter and the question of causation is taken up once more, stress being place not so much on deprivation per se as on the lack of safety nets and institutional provision for those victims of certain kinds of poverty and marginality described in chapters one, five and seven, and on the effects of culture contact with reference to every aspect of life and in particular to the traditional system of authority.

However, the picture of Ijebu Mahdists as forlorn, helpless individuals who stand and watch as their cherished past is destroyed before their very eyes is not one which

accurately describes the situation. There was much about the past that many were happy to see disappear. Mahdists, rather, were those who saw the world changing and felt that some of the changes were necessary but they did not have the intellectual or spiritual, let alone material, means to cope with them.

Like their leader they were caught between not just two but three worlds - the Traditional, the Muslim and the Christian/Western - each one, and particularly the Muslim and the Christian/Western, being capable of destroying the other. And this explains much of the surprise element and indeed the originality and appeal of Mahdiyya millenarian activity and of its symbolism, especially the Ark of the Covenant containing the bound copies of the Bible and the Qur'an which all were obliged to revere and study, and the cruciform Temple of the New Jerusalem with its minaret. Both sets of symbols demonstrate the mahdists' attempt to preserve and develop some of the best aspects of their Muslim faith and of their traditional way of life, under severe pressure from western technology and culture, and particularly western education, and jettison others, while at the same time coming to terms with western, largely seen as Christian, ideas and assumptions. Although it passed through a number of phases and manifested different kinds of "response to the world" it was this orientation, this attempt to create a new synthesis that characterised the Mahdiyya for most of the time and for this reason it is, perhaps, most aptly described, as a revitalization movement.

Methodological Note

This study makes use of the historical and sociological methods of enquiry. Very broadly, it makes use of the former to trace the origins and development of the mahdist notion in the West African and Nigerian contexts and to provide an account of a particular example of a Mahdist movement, the Mahdiyya movement, in relation to a particular context, that of Ijebuland in south-western Nigeria. For this purpose it relied on the available written sources and oral tradition.

The sociological approach also used, as will be seen below, in the specific case study, enabled the boundaries of explanation to be extended outward beyond the local context. Moreover, it provided useful concepts and typologies as tools for analysis making, thereby, for a degree of clarity and useful generalization that would not otherwise have been possible.

The methods used were once again primary and secondary written sources, along with interviews and participant observation, three of the most important tools of the sociologist. The low level of literacy in either English or Yoruba meant that there was only a very limited use for that other important tool of the sociologist, the questionnaire.

Although from the point of view of method this study did not present too many unfamiliar difficulties it is, nevertheless, worth mentioning here one or two of the problems encountered.

First of all a point regarding interviewing. When working in largely non-literate societies or with essentially non-literate communities such as the Mahdiyya a great deal, much of it seemingly obvious, needs to be learned before any degree of success can be achieved. There is, for example, the thorny problem of who to interview, thorny because it can often only be carried out with the permission of the leadership of the community in question. It also requires a knowledge of the roles allotted to different members, of the principle of seniority that prevails, of the movement's relations with other communities and importantly its method of imparting knowledge. On this last point it is quite common to encounter members of many years standing in the community who repeatedly insist that they know nothing of its teachings and direct the enquirer to the leader.

Although a natural response to this would be to interpret it as a form of control over members by the leadership or to treat it simply as device for concealing knowledge from an outsider, this may not be so. Very often people in such communities learn how to <u>do</u> things without being informed of the reasons why, without being given an explanation and,

therefore, do not "know". They do not have, nor do they necessarily believe that it is important to have, an explanation for what they do. And even where there is an explanation this is usually given in stages so that those in senior positions always know more than those below them.

Thus, a "don't know" response from a well established member of a community such as the Mahdiyya is not necessarily an attempt to evade the question and can even be very revealing about the system of transmitting knowledge that operates in that community. In the case of the Mahdiyya this researcher's attempt to by-pass the leadership and go directly to the grass roots was unsuccessful. This can, of course, mean that unless ways are found of inviting the rank and file members to express their views much of one's account will be written from the perspective of the leadership. Moreover, if seen constantly in its company the researcher might risk becoming the property of that leadership and will hear little if any independent opinion from other sources.

As to participant observation this involves immersing oneself in the community while at the same time appearing to reject its beliefs and, therefore, becoming something of a scandal and even a threat to its growth. Members are sometimes inclined to question why the researcher does not become a member and some may even begin to wonder if the message being preached is true.

The problems associated with participant observation become particularly acute where, as in the case of the Mahdiyya, splintering has occurred and the researcher is obliged to participate in the life of two communities now bitterly opposed. To be adjudged to be favouring one by, for example, more frequent attendance at its worship can lead to serious difficulties with the other.

These difficulties are by no means insurmountable but they show that sociological research methods while enabling the enquirer to come closer to the subject under investigation can pose as many problems as documents do for the historian.

1. N. Cohn, the Pursuit of the Millennium, London: Paladin Books, 1957, p. 13.

2. Cf. : D. B. Macdonald, "Al-Mahdi" in H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers (eds), The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974, pp. 310 ff.

3. Ibn Khaldun, The Muqadimmah: An Introduction to World History, (trans from the Arabic by F. Rosenthal), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958, Vol II, chap. III sections 50-51, pp. 156 ff.

4. J. R. Willis, In the Path of Allah: The Passion of Al-Hajj Umar, London: F. Cass, 1989, p. 37.

5. B. R. Wilson, Religious Sects, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970 pp. 36-47.

6. H. A. R. Gibb, Islam, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, (2nd edition), 1953, p. 131.

7. M. Douglas, Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology, Harmondsworth (Middlesex): Penguin Books, 1970, pp. 186 ff.

8. S. L. Thrupp, "Millenial Dreams in Action" Comparative Studies in Society and History (Supplement II), 1962, p. 14.

9. Cohn, op. cit., pp. 53 ff.

10. J. Iliffe, The African Poor: A History, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987 pp. 4ff.

Chapter 1: The Islamic millenarian tradition in West Africa with special reference to Nigeria.

This chapter provides, by way of background to our study of the Mahdiyya movement in south-western Nigeria, a general overview of the origins and development of the millenarian notions of the Mahdi, the God-guided-one, and the Mujaddid, Renewer, in early Islam, and the transmission to and impact on West African, and more specifically, Nigerian Islam of these chiliastic beliefs.

The concern here, therefore, is with when and how ideas about the Mahdi and the Mujaddid, the renewer, became part of the conceptual framework of West African Muslims, and also with such interesting matters as the social and educational background of the principal carriers of these beliefs, the social and environmental contexts in which the beliefs appealed, the social constituency of Mahdism, the purposes which mahdist and /or ideas of renewal were made to serve and the achievements of mahdist-inspired movements in West Africa as a whole and particularly in Nigeria.

But first of all we turn to a brief discussion of the origins, meaning, development, carriers and application of the mahdist and renewal concepts in early Islam for, as will be seen, so much of this early history influenced later developments in West Africa and Nigeria.

Notions of Mahdism and Renewal in early Islam

Although the notion of the Mahdi or divinely-guided one and that of the Mujaddid or Renewer were sometimes used in West African Islam as if they were interchangeable, for the purpose of this analysis, they will be treated separately beginning with the idea of the Mahdi.

While the term Mahdi is not to be found in the Qur'an there is, nevertheless, therein a related word, muhtadi, the one who accepts guidance.[1] Moreover, although the belief in a final restorer of Islam, a Mahdi-like figure, is found in the most "sound" compendia of hadith, tradition, the Sahihs of al-Bukhari and Muslim, the term Mahdi itself is not used.[2]

Those later hadith or traditions which use the term have been declared by Muslim scholars, notably Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), to be unsound or "weak".[3]

Furthermore, while all Muslims look to a final restorer of Islam much of Sunnite Islamic eschatology does not refer to this figure as the Mahdi.[4] According to certain Muslim scholars, among them the great popularising theologian, Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058-IIII), from Tus in modern day Iran, the Mahdi figure is a popular creation "born" and, as he maintained, "nurtured and cultivated in the main by the multitudes" who saw in him an instrument against oppression.[5]

Ibn Khaldun refers to the widespread nature and persistence of the belief in this way:

> "It has been well known (and generally accepted) by all Muslims in every epoch, that at the end of time a man from the family (of the Prophet) will without fail make his appearance, one who will strengthen the religion and make justice triumph. The Muslims will follow him and he will gain domination over the Muslim realm. He will be called the Mahdi. Following him the Antichrist will appear, together with all the subsequent signs of the Hour (the Day of Judgment). After (the Mahdi) Isa (Jesus) will descend and kill the Antichrist. Or, Jesus will descend together with the Mahdi and help him kill (the Antichrist), and have him as the leader in his prayers."[6]

Like al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun regarded the Mahdi as a popular construct and, therefore, scarcely deserving of any serious theological reflection. Al-Ghazali shows this by paying little or no attention to the Mahdi in his writings on eschatology, while Ibn Khaldun, as already indicated, argues that the mahdist notion has no foundation in authentic hadith or tradition and consequently treated popular notions of mahdism, as will be seen below, with a certain amount of disdain.

But, as already indicated, neither Ibn Khaldun's disdain nor its absence from the Qur'an and "sound" hadith has prevented the term Mahdi from being applied, albeit not always in a technical sense, to both historical figures - examples being Abraham, prophet Muhammad himself, his cousin and son-in-law Ali, and the first four Caliphs - and to eschatological individuals including the Abassid Caliph, al Nasir (1188-1225 C.E.). Moreover, there have been no shortage of African Mahdis, as we shall see, some of the most prominent among

them being Ubayddulah al-Mahdi (d.934 C.E.) who founded the Fatimid dynasty that ruled in North Africa in the tenth century, Muhammad Ibn Tumart (d.1130 C.E.), founder of the Almohad movement in the Maghrib and Muhammad Ahmad ibn Abdullah (d.1885) who founded the mahdist state in the Sudan in the late nineteenth century, the thirteenth century of the Muslim era, a century of unprecedented Islamic millenial expectancy in West Africa, including Nigeria, and elsewhere.[7]

The mahdist idea is found in both Sunni and Shi'ite Islam and while at the popular, grass roots level both groups perceive the final restorer of Islam in an almost identical way officially his status, role and importance in the two traditions differ. In Ithna'asharite or Twelver Shi'ite theology, to take as an example the largest branch of Shi'ism, the Hidden Imam - the twelfth Imam and last of the Imams, hence the name Twelvers - is an essential part of the creed. His role is that of an infallible and indispensable guide.[8]

In this tradition certainty concerning the meaning of the divine revelation comes through the Hidden Imam and through him alone and not through the body of the faithful or through those qualified scholars - mudjtahids - who, although they are the representatives of the Hidden Imam can, nevertheless, err. In Sunni Islam by contrast the people are the ultimate interpreters of the revelation given by God to man through Prophet Muhammad. Thus, in the Sunni tradition the Mahdi is not and cannot be regarded as infallible - only the prophets are protected from error - and his role, therefore, is not that of ultimate arbiter of the revelation but the restorer of that consensus arrived at by the qualified mudjtahids or scholars.[9]

Moreover, whereas in Shi'ite Islam the Hidden Imam will rule personally and by divine right the Mahdi in the Sunni perspective is simply the final successor or caliph of Prophet Muhammad and as such will restore the pattern of rule established by the founder of Islam.

To return to the traditions or hadith relating to the Mahdi, the majority of the "weak" traditions bearing on him are not only "weak" but also late. And, it is worth noting, the later the traditions and the more popular the sources the more fixed becomes the belief in the Mahdi.

These traditions are not always consistent with each other and as a consequence allow for difference of interpretation concerning the place of origin, the house or nation, the character, physical appearance, the appointed time and the length of rule of the Mahdi. Part of the explanation for the divergence lies in the fact that the traditions themselves are sometimes the product of rival factions attempting to wrest power from one another and as such throw light on the inter-ethnic conflicts and political struggles of the times.[10]

Although they often differ in detail, as already pointed out, there are, nonetheless, a number of common and recurrent themes in these mahdist traditions. For example, many have as their central message the belief that upheavals and dissension (fitnan) will divide the Muslim community (umma), that it will be wracked by political strife, social disorder and moral degeneration, that injustice and oppression will be so widespread that the good person will have no other option than to abandon society and live in seclusion awaiting the advent of the Mahdi or Deliverer who will fill the world, in a state of anarchy and chaos, with equity and justice for a short period before the End of Time.

Furthermore, the vast majority of these traditions trace the idea of the final Deliverer or Mahdi back to Prophet Muhammad as the principal source of this belief. Many state, for example, that the prophet Muhammad announced that the Mahdi would be of his own house, a descendant of his daughter Fatima, that he would bear the name Muhammad, and that his father's name would be that of his own father, Abd Allah. As to his appearance, the Mahdi would be "bald of the forehead, hook-nosed and high-nosed", and in temperament and disposition would resemble Muhammad himself.[11]

In terms of his accomplishments, Muhammad allegedly foretold that the Mahdi would bring

unimaginable prosperity to Muslims: "money in that day will be like that which is trodden underfoot and uncounted". Moreover, he would replace a world of unbelief, oppression and injustice with firm faith in God, justice and plenty. And, as to the manner of his coming, the Mahdi would appear suddenly and unexpectedly.[12]

On the vital question of the "appointed hour" of the Mahdi, it is worth noting here that Shi'ite Islam has no means of knowing anything about this other than that the Hidden Imam and /or Mahdi is to come at the End of Time. This idea of the End of Time being the moment for the advent of the Hidden Imam arose, as Arjomand has shown, out of a development of theology expounded during the time of the seventh Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq, and was intended interestingly to dampen down millenarian fervour which was considered to be extremely dangerous to the regime.

Basing his case for a divinely guided Imam who would act as the authoritative teacher of all mankind in all religious matters, Jafar as-Sadiq propounded the doctrine, mentioned above, of the Imam's infallibility and absolute authority.[13] Moreover, he presented the Imam not only as the repository of God's knowledge and the interpreter of his revelation, but also as:

> ". . .the pillar of God's unity (tawhid). . .immune from sin and error. . .possessed of the power of miracles and of irrefutable arguments. . .(he) may be likened in this community to the ark of Noah: he who boards it obtains salvation and reaches the gate of repentance".[14]

As Arjomand has demonstrated, Jafar as-Sadiq's interpretation of the doctrine of the Imamate made for a clear division, not found in Sunni Islam, between the responsibilities of the Imam and those of the political leader, allocating to the former the final authority in all matters of sacred law, conscience and salvation.[15] Moreover, by insisting on the notion of designation, nass, based on the prophet Muhammad's allegedly explicit nomination of Ali as his successor, he preserved on the one hand the hereditary principle that the imamate is located in a given individual who must be a descendant of Ali, and

on the other that it is passed on by explicit appointment.[16]

Although this ruled out any claim to the Imamate on political grounds and thereby removed one of the more intractable problems facing Shi'ite communities especially on the death of the Imam, it, nevertheless, created other serious difficulties over the succession, especially where the incumbent Imam had no male heir, as was the case with the eleventh Imam.

This acute problem was eventually solved by the introduction of the doctrine of Ghaybat, often referred to as either occultation or concealment, according to which the Twelfth Imam was believed to be fulfilling his functions whilst in hiding and would one day return. This idea not only further separated the Imamate from political rule, thereby secularizing the latter, but turned the former into something of an abstraction. As Arjomand has convincingly argued, from the thirteenth century the Imamate became increasingly apolitical.[17] Moreover, according to Madelung:

> "The eternal reality of the imamate, now commonly termed walaya (quality of a wali, "friend of God"), was defined as the esoteric aspect of prophecy. The Imam was thus viewed as the initiator into the mystical truth by virtue of the theophanic quality of his essential nature as well as by his teachings as expressed in the transmitted logia of the Imams."[18]

This process whereby the imamate came increasingly to be viewed as the "esoteric aspect of prophecy" satisfied the political aims of Ja'far as-Sadiq who had been concerned to prevent it from functioning as the focal point of religious extremism in the form of millenarianism. However, millenarian supporting beliefs such as the belief in the return (raj'a) of the dead Imam were not easily cast to one side. If not always, then very often on the death of a Shi'ite leader the belief that he would return as the Qa'im or Mahdi, sword in hand, to restore to the descendants of Ali their rights, especially the usurpation of the house of Ali, continued to prove to be extremely destabilising.[19]

Jafar-as-Sadiq's successors likewise attempted to depoliticise the Imamate turning to the works of scholars where these showed the return of the Qa'im to be false and claiming

that the Hidden Imam, present as the Mahdi of the people, would return at the End of Time, rather than as the redresser whose second coming and uprising could be expected imminently.[20]

However, such imprecise and, to many, vague and empty interpretations of the advent of the Hidden Imam and/ or Mahdi figure that sought to dilute the chiliastic element of the belief by sublimating it as far as possible into an eschatology, did not succeed. Not least because the social and political conditions which gave the belief its relevance and intensity remained. Mahdist movement after mahdist movement nurtured by popular Sufism arose to challenge the authorities, particularly among the common people in the more highly decentralised societies in Iran and throughout the Shi'ite world.[21]

Sufism, as Ibn Khaldun noted, was much more precise in its forecasts concerning the "appointed hour" and this may have been one reason for the widespread nature of its appeal. Ibn Khaldun informs us that the renowned Sufi, Ibn Arabi, whom he regarded as responsible for the Sufi tendency to predict the advent of the Imam and/ or Mahdi, foretold that the Mahdi would appear in the year 1284-85 C.E., and when this prediction failed his followers allegedly extended the period and invented new prophecies.[22]

Predicting the precise time when the Mahdi would appear became a favourite pastime of many leading Sufis who, claiming the power of mystical unveiling or kashf, spread abroad among the people numerous prophecies bearing on this question. In the West African context, as will be seen below, the thirteenth Muslim century (1785-1882 C.E.) came to be of great significance in this respect.[23]

To return to the discussion of the common elements in the traditions concerning the Mahdi. As to the length of time it would take for the Mahdi to accomplish his mission this varies slightly from tradition to tradition. However, most traditions appear to agree that he would not tarry in restoring the world to Islam, his rule lasting for a period of as little as five or seven or nine years.[24]

Regarding his place of origin some of the earlier of these "late" traditions foretell that the Mahdi will come from the East, from beyond the river Oxus, while others compiled later point to Medina and others to the Maghrib as the place of his appearance. Although, as already noted, these traditions were not considered "sound" by Ibn Khaldun and others, they along with those concerning the Mujaddid and/or Renewer, found a home in the writings of eminently respectable scholars, the two most important of whom, as far as the Islamic millenarian tradition in western Africa is concerned, were the distinguished Egyptian scholar Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (1445-1505 C.E.) and the jurist Muhammad b. Abd al-Karim al-Maghili (1425-1505 C.E.) from the ancient city of Tlemcen in the Central Maghrib.[25]

As previously pointed out, the mahdist notion is often used in close conjunction with that of Renewer of Islam. Some Sunni traditions speak of the appearance of eight such Renewers, the last of whom will be the Mahdi, while others refer to ten and others to twelve, the Mahdi being once again the last one in every case.[26]

Al-Maghili, just mentioned, carries a reference in one of his works to a hadith first recorded by Abu Dawud (d.889) on the Mujaddid:

> " On the authority of Abu Huraya and on the authority of the Messenger of God, who said: "God sends to this community at the head (ra's) of each hundred years one/those (man) who will regenerate its religion for it".[27]

As will be indicated below al-Maghili's reference to this hadith undoubtedly contributed to the spread of the belief in the advent of a Renewer every century among Muslim teachers in the West African setting.[28] And equally important in this respect were the writings and counsels of al-Suyuti. We can now examine the pivotal role played by these two scholars in the development of the mahdist and renewal beliefs first in the West African and later in the Nigerian setting.

<u>Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti and the Islamic millenarian tradition in West Africa</u>

Although he never visited West Africa al-Suyuti exerted a profound influence over its

Muslim population, and in particular over the Tuareg of the Sahel region, through his writings, counsel, and his occasional encounters with its rulers and scholars. The peak period of al-Suyuti's influence was from c.1465-1495 CE, and as one authority on Islam in the region has written:

> "No Muslim people in those lands escaped his influence...His works were popular. They were copied and recopied, quoted and used for ideas. More than this, al-Suyuti took an active part in the political upheavals of Takrur, Air and Tagedda. He sent exhortations to rulers, dissuading monarchs from military adventures, and he staged the investiture of Sahelian Sultans by the Caliph in Cairo."[29]

According to Norris al-Suyuti's name became a "by word" among the jurists and mystics of Air and Tagedda some of whom studied with him in Cairo while making their way to Mecca. Moreover, some, among them Abu-l-Huda, a great name in fifteenth and sixteenth century Tuareg Islam, became a correspondent and close friend.[30]

Several of the Sahel's and western Sudan's rulers were known to him if not personally, then at least by name, and his good offices appear to have been responsible for the investiture as Sultan by the Caliph in Cairo of at least one of them, Askiya Muhammad Ture I of Songhay.[31]

Many Sahelian Muslim scholars wrote to al-Suyuti seeking his advice on points of Islamic law and practice. Questions of inheritance, the establishment of fiefs, rights to pasturage and on fighting non-Muslims were among the many issues they raised with him in their correspondence and the advice and guidance he gave them on these and other matters relating to Islamic law and practice are said to have had a profound impact on the style of Islam practised in the Sahel. For example, on the extremely important subject of jihad or holy war he counselled that:

> "he who does not fight is more exalted".

And this counsel has been regarded as "crucial in forming the pacific ideas" of the Ineslemen, scholars, of the Kel-es-Suq.[32] However, it is Al-Suyuti's views on the subject of the Mahdi and the Mujaddid that are the principal concern here, a subject inextricably

bound up with the question of tajdid or the reform of Islam. In one of his works al-Suyuti stated that in all there would be twelve "rightly guided" caliphs and that in his time there were:

> " Two more rightly guided caliphs yet to come, the last of whom would be the Mahdi."[33]

Further, in another of his treatises he discussed the opinions of scholars of different times on the identity of the Mujaddid or Renewer and in an appendix to this work he listed those whom he considered to be the renewers for each century, even expressing the hope that he himself would be regarded as the Renewer of the ninth Muslim century (1397-1494 C.E.). The Renewer of the final century would be the Mahdi or Jesus.[34]

Al-Suyuti's thinking shaped that of a number of West African Muslim scholars not only on the matters mentioned above including that of the Renewer in relation to reform but also on the way the idea of the Renewer came to be developed over time from that of a single such individual for each century to a plurality of such persons according to either activity or locality, a development, it has been suggested, which might well have reflected the increasing disunity in the Muslim community.[35] On the other hand, it may also have been the result of the growth of that community at all levels - governmental, theological and legal as well as territorial - and the realization that one Renewer was inadequate to the task of reforming all of its many and varied aspects everywhere.[36]

The idea of a plurality of Renewers had the support of the scholar Ibn Kathir (d.1373) and although al-Suyuti himself favoured a single figure he did concede that since the task of reform embraced the whole of the umma this might well require several Renewers, each one being responsible for a different sphere of activity. This would entail one Renewer for hadith, another for fiqh another for government and so on.

This idea of plurality was interpreted in different ways. There were those scholars who argued for plurality based, as already indicated, on activity_ while others made locality the

principal criterion, and some even combined both activity and locality as the bench-mark for deciding the number of Renewers possible in any one region. Among the leading Muslim scholars in the Sahel and beyond who took up the idea of plurality were the well known Timbuktu jurist Ahmad Baba (d.I627) and the even more widely known and influential Shaykh al-Mukhtar al-Kunti (d.18II).[37] The former espoused that form of plurality based on locality while the latter interpreted the idea of plurality to mean plurality based on activity.

Although al-Suyuti must bear much of the initial responsibility, both of these leading figures in their different ways contributed to the opening of a Pandora's box of self-proclaimed Renewers and Mahdis across the face of West Africa and beyond. Willis says of the extent of al-Suyuti's influence:

> "Of the figures under discussion, his seems to have been the most ascendent influence in raising the mujaddid standard beyond the central lands of Islam. The Shaykh Ahmad Faruq Sirhindi, animated by the force of al-Suyuti's claim, lifted the banner of the mujaddid in India. . ."[38]

We will return again to al-Suyuti to show his influence on the thinking of Shaykh Uthman b. Fudi and his son Muhammad Bello, of Hausaland in northern Nigeria, two of the most effective and dedicated of all West African Muslim reformers and strong proponents of Mahdism, and on others caught up in what amounted to a neo-mahdist craze in nineteenth century West Africa. Meanwhile, al-Maghili's early contribution to the themes of renewal and mahdism in West African Islam merits attention.

Muhammad b. Abd al-Karim al-Maghili and the Islamic millenarian tradition in West Africa

Al-Maghili had first-hand knowledge of the condition of Islam in West Africa.[39] He travelled extensively in the region and taught in a number of its cities including Kano and Katsina in Nigeria, and what he saw and experienced of Islam in these localities most probably re-enforced any ideas he might have already entertained about the need for a

Renewer. He was not, however, alone in believing that Islam was in dire need of renewal. A fifteenth century text from the Sahel makes clear the concern of some Tuareg scholars about the sorry plight of Islam in the region listing fifty-seven practices which were considered to be unorthodox.[40] The document depicts the region in question- possibly either Tadamakkatt or Agades - as a veritable "Vanity Fair".[41]

Among the practices and customs that caused concern to its author and other local Muslim scholars were those of magic, of women going about unveiled, the use of talismans, the playing of musical instruments such as the lute, the widespread practice of bribery even where appointments to such posts as that of qadi or Muslim judge were concerned, the worship of idols and the superficial character of qur'anic teaching provided in the main by poorly trained teachers who knew little or no Arabic and who were, thus, unable to distinguish between a valid and a distorted interpretation of the faith. These scholars, "venal scholars" in the words of Muhammad al-Lamtuni, author of the Sahelian text under discussion, and similar in character to those described by al-Ghazali as "scholars of the world", were alleged to have preferred mundane rewards such as rank and influence to the truth. In addition there were rulers who violated almost every imaginable Islamic precept from the levying of unlawful taxes to the shedding of Muslim blood and the practice of "takhlit", the mixing of unbelief with Islam.

It was conditions such as these that strengthened the stern, rigid, legalistic, even militant al-Maghili in his conviction that the time was right for a Renewer of the faith. This much is clear from his Replies to the questions posed by Muhammad al-Lamtuni. The Replies also contains a brief discussion about the Renewer of Islam, a discussion which, as we shall see shortly, was to have a considerable impact on the thinking of the Muslim reformer in Hausaland, northern Nigeria, Shaykh Uthman b.Fudi (c.1754-1817).

Basing himself on the already mentioned tradition recounted by Abu Dawud in the ninth

century al-Maghili told al-Lamtuni:

> "Thus it is related that at the beginning of every century God sends men a scholar who regenerates their religion for them. There is no doubt that the conduct of this scholar in every century in enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and setting aright peoples' affairs, establishing justice among them and supporting truth against falsehood and the oppressed against the oppressor, will be in contrast to the scholars of his age."[42]

Furthermore, there would clearly be no difficulty in recognising this scholar for he will be:

> ". . .an odd man out among them on account of his being the only man of such pure conduct and on account of the small number of men like him".[43]

Commenting on this reference to the Renewer Hunwick states:

> " Although this idea is an old one in Islam - it was known to Ibn Hanbal (d.855) and is the subject of a hadith first recorded by Abu Dawud (d.889) - it may be through this reference in al-Maghili's work that it became more widely known in West Africa."[44]

More will be said later about the influence of the writings of al-Maghili and those of al-Suyuti, on the thinking of many Muslim reformers in West Africa and in particular on the renewal programme of Shaykh Uthman b. Fudi first caliph of the Sokoto empire in Hausaland in northern Nigeria and Muhammad Bello, his son and successor. However, before moving on to discuss Mahdism and renewal in nineteenth century Hausaland we need to consider briefly the vital role of the educated or "clerical" classes, and in particular that of the Torodbe to which both Uthman b. Fudi and Muhammad Bello belonged, in shaping the form and content of West African Islam, and its relations with government and its response to the surrounding society, as well as in the transmission of millenarian ideas across the length and breadth of the region from the sixteenth century.

Muslim "clerisies" pacifism, militancy and Mahdism c. 1500-1800

Numerous Muslim "clerisies" emerged in the Sahel from the fourteenth century onwards among them the Zawaya, the Jakhanke, the Kunta, the Mande and the Torodbe clerisies, all of which came to be bound up with the Sufi tradition.[45] Furthermore, the period 1500-1800, saw the gradual institutionalization of a Muslim "clerical" class making for the

possibility, as Weber pointed out, of much greater conflict between "church" and "state" or the spheres of religion and politics.[46]

However, at no time during the period under review was there a wholly uniform, consistent, clearly thought out Muslim clerical response to either the wider world or government. These could vary considerably depending on such factors as the social status and standing of the clerics, the degree to which their livelihood depended on direct commercial involvement in society, the size and influence of the Muslim community and the ethnic and religious make up of society. In certain towns such as Timbuktu the Muslim cleric enjoyed considerable status, prestige and wealth whereas elsewhere, for example, among the Torodbe of the Upper Senegal region, his status was much lower and his material conditions much inferior.[47] Moreover, the Muslim students attached to the Torodbe clerics and others were widely regarded as being among society's "undesirables".

As to their political leanings "clerics" varied greatly. Generally, however, they strove to maintain a position of neutrality where government was concerned.[48] There was also co-operation between scholar and ruler and usually the wealthier and more prestigious the cleric the more he was inclined to move in this direction, while the poorer cleric of low status increasingly tended to function not only outside of but also as an informal opposition to government.

On the question of the relationship and the degree and quality of the co-operation between Muslims and the wider community this depended like so much else on the strength of the Muslim community within that society. By the end of the fourteenth century and throughout the period under discussion Islam was still very much the religion of a minority of the peoples of West Africa. Moreover, Muslims did not constitute a homogeneous community. Some Muslims, we might label them accommodationists and/ or pluralists, either chose or were obliged to participate in the social, political, cultural and religious life of the communities in which they lived. This was the position of most of the scholar or

sacerdotal classes who sought through peaceful means, if not to radically change, the religious, political and economic systems of the societies in which they lived, then at least to shape them so that they came to resemble more closely the Islamic model. The Torodbe class was the main exception, opting as it did for a militant approach.[49]

Prominent among the exponents of this pacific approach, an approach adopted by Muhammad Jumat Imam, the Mahdi-Messiah and founder of the Mahdiyya of Ijebuland, were the Jakhanke of the Senegambia who were the followers of the thirteenth century West African Muslim cleric Shaykh al-Hajj Salim Suware.[50] This clerical class settled among communities composed in the main of people of servile status and taught the Qur'an, the Islamic sciences and a range of practical subjects.

In these villages, as was the case everywhere where illiteracy was widespread, the Jakhanke enjoyed tremendous prestige, mainly on account of the fact that they were literate in Arabic. Such literacy and the instruments used to transmit it could be valued for a variety of reasons including their magical properties. As Goody has pointed out:

> " The instruments of writing easily became invested with a supernatural power, particularly where writing is a primarily religious activity. Especially is this true of the ink and other colouring used in writing on paper, papyrus, slates or skins for the material that actually gives concrete embodiment to speech is held to encapsulate the communicative power of the word. To wash the colour from off the writing surface and then swallow it down is to drink in . . .a power which would otherwise remain external to the observer."[51]

Literacy also served very practical ends. As far back as the twelfth century the Arabic scholar Al-Idrisi (1100-c.1166 C.E.) wrote of the Tuareg belief in the magical power of the written word using it as a means of finding their way when lost in the desert or of discovering things that they had misplaced.[52] And literacy's power to protect is referred to in the seventeenth century Tarikh al-Sudan (History of the Sudan) which relates how a ruler attempting to ward off a rival claimant to his throne placed the Qur'an and Sahih of al-Bukhari on his head and cried out:

> "I place myself under the protection of these books".[53]

Moreover, it is a common practice in Muslim communities in West Africa for students to drink the water used to wash off the qur'anic verses from the slates or writing boards in the belief that this is a means not only of absorbing the word of the God but also of protection against sickness and danger. The Bible likewise came to assume the same protective and healing qualities and, as will be seen in chapter four, performed many of the same functions.

Learning was the principal means used by the Jakhanke to spread Islam, something they did not only peacefully but also with great tolerance, turning a blind eye, as was their wont, to such traditional practices as divination and marriage between a man and his brother's daughter, both of which are prohibited by Islamic law. And in their dealings with government they strove to maintain a position of neutrality although, as Levtzion has shown, it was not always possible to remain completely neutral. At least indirectly, by providing amulets for the protection of rulers and by attending enthronement ceremonies, they supported the secular authority.[54]

Like the Jakhanke, the Kunta were another of the clerical classes to promote both scholarship and the peaceful development of Islam. Barth spoke of them as being:

> "distinguished by their purer blood and by their learning as above almost all the tribes of the desert".[55]

At varying stages between the second half of the fifteenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century the Kunta left the northern Sahara and penetrated further south. The first group to move south did so under the leadership of Sidi Muhammad al-Kunti, from whom the Kunta received their name. Once established in the Western Sahara they assumed the leadership in commerce, politics and religion and when internal dissension led to the widespread dispersal of Kunta families across the Western Sudan, where they introduced the Qadiriyya brotherhood, they became the leaders in commerce and Islamic learning there also.[56] Perhaps the best known of the Kunta mystics and scholar-reformers in the Western

Sudan and particularly in the Upper and Middle Niger regions in this period was the highly influential Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kabir al-Kunti (c.1722-1811).[57]

Author of innumerable treatises and books on the mystical life, Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar was an ardent pacifist insisting throughout on the reform of Islam by means of greater jihad, that is spiritual warfare against one's own evil desires and inclinations. A man noted for the simplicity of his appearance Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar came to be regarded as an extra-ordinary figure and was described by the above mentioned Hausa Muslim reformer, Muhammad Bello, as:

> "The legal expert, the mystic, the upright wali, the Pole of Poles. . .the last of the Sufi imams who were well versed in the shari'a and the sciences of haqiqa".[58]

Others claimed that he possessed the gift of bilocation, the power to revive the dead and to predict the future, and many believed him to be the Mujaddid, the Renewer of Islam for the thirteenth Muslim century (1785-1882.C.E).

Among the Tuareg Ineslemen or clerical class one group in particular, the Kel Es-Suq of Tadamakkat in the Adrar-n-Ifoghas, stands out as the main protagonist of the pacific approach to Islamic reform. The Kel Es-Suq were Maliki jurists and mystics of the Qadiriyya. Some served the Iwillimeden Tuaregs, a people of obscure origins who during the period under review dominated the area between Timbuktu and Gao. Other Ineslemen served the Imashaghen, the noble class among the Tuareg. As scholars they are noted for, among other things, their development of the most artistic Arabic script of the Sahel, formed by mastering the Kufic-type Andalusian Arabic script, which they employed in epitaphs and adapted for their calligraphy.[59]

Once again the Kel Es-Suq and other Tuareg Ineslemen provide an example of a scholarly class occupying a subordinate position and highly dependent on the patronage of its overlords, a dependency which it often found burdensome and frustrating. The response to this frustration was variable, some Ineslemen not only justifying jihad as a legitimate

means for settling their grievances but even proposing the idea of creating a Tuareg Islamic empire under their command, while others including the vast majority of Kel Es-Suq, declared such militancy illegal and unworthy of holy men and scholars.[60]

Examples of militant scholars include Sidi Mahmud al-Baghdadi (c.1500-c.1550), possibly of Turkish or Persian origin, who after training in Sufism in Istanbul became a leading member of Mahmudiyya tariqa, an offshoot of the Khalwatiyya Sufi brotherhood.[61] Although predated in the region by the Qadiriyya, the Mahmudiyya was the only Sufi movement to emerge in and take root among the Tuareg of the Southern Sahara. Moreover, it was to exercise a considerable influence on the Nigerian reformer Shaykh Uthman b. Fudi.[62]

Sidi Mahmud was to attain a semi-divine status among his Tuareg followers and even though he apparently denied that he was the Mahdi this was not enough to dissuade all of his followers from claiming him to be the Mahdi, nor did it convince the Sultan of Agades who had him put to death around 1550 on suspicion that he was a militant reformer opposed to his government.[63] Numerous other militant scholar-mystics were to emerge during the period under review when mahdist expectations among the Tuareg remained high.

Mande clerics took a very similar line on matters of reform to their counterparts among the Jakhanke, Kel Es-Suq, Zawaya and Kunta. Mande Muslims, in Arabic sources the Wangara, were known by different names according to the region in which they lived: to the Mande speaking Bambara of the Middle Niger they were Marka, to those of the Upper Niger they were Dyula, and Yarse to the Mole-Dogbane people of the Upper Black Volta region.[64]

Mande Islam was characterised by tolerance and lack of fanaticism and this is not at all surprising given their minority status among "pagan" agriculturalists and given the initial hostility which they encountered as they attempted to build up their commercial activities.

As Willis has stated with reference to the Mande/Dyula in Kong and the adjacent regions:

> "They were compelled to pay out large sums for the privilege of trading with their neighbours. Commercial transactions were at first unprofitable as a goodly percentage of their revenue went to disarm those who would gladly have pillaged their goods had they not been assuaged with monetary offerings."[65]

Elsewhere in order not to appear outwardly different from the local pagan peoples they adopted the custom of scarification, marking themselves on the cheeks and abdomen. These, it may be noted, are some of the historical and ethnic roots of Muslim Mande syncretism. There was also an important economic component to their syncretism. To be successful as traders Mande Muslims had to insert their kinsfolk into the local areas slowly and with great caution, and thereby build up a reliable system of personal relationships as the principal means for the expansion of their commercial activities, and this they did with remarkable success over time.

However, the establishment of such a trading network did not do away with the need for protection, and even if there had been no need of protection the warrior class would have forced it upon them. Mande Muslims tended to live in communities under imams who had full authority over spiritual matters, while secular matters were in the hands of their non-Muslim custodians, warriors by profession, and it was they who decided who could and who could not engage in trade and commerce.

As elsewhere between the Muslim scholars and their protectors, the relationship between the Mande Muslim learned class and its custodian was one of interdependence. The former as traders depended on the warriors' protection along the trade roots, a protection made all the more necessary by the constant danger of enslavement which threatened all those who ventured too far beyond their local community, and the latter on the economic services and financial contributions made to them by the Mande Muslim clerics. Fortunately for the Mande they had the resources to pay for such protection and this undoubtedly gave them a commercial advantage over the local inhabitants.

The relationship, however, was an uneasy one, the warrior as protector despising the beliefs, practices and intellectual pursuits of the Muslim cleric and at times harassing their wives and families and plundering their goods. The Mande clerisy, nevertheless, rarely if ever abandoned their quietistic tradition which probably had its origins in the opinions of al-Hajj Salim Suwari whose ideas and attitudes to militancy have just been outlined when considering Jakhanke pacifism.[66] Although, for reasons mentioned previously, military conflict was hardly an option open to them, Mande and Jakhanke Muslims, the West African Muslim counterparts to the Quakers seem, nevertheless, to have had an instinctive horror of war, and even went so far as to claim that all just people, including animists, could be saved providing they led exemplary lives, maintaining that after their death these animists would enter a kind of purgatory from which they would eventually emerge as Muslims.[67]

As already indicated, not all Muslim scholars advocated the peaceful path of reform, the Torodbe clerisy being the most consistent proponents, among the clerical classes discussed, of jihad of the sword. Beginning with Nasr al-Din's jihad (1673-74) in what is today southern Mauritania and the northern Senegambia, the Torodbe were the inspiration behind a series of interrelated militant Islamic revivalist movements, almost all of them with a pronounced millenarian dimension.[68]

An idea of the content of the preaching of these reformers can be had from a contemporary account of the activities of Nasr al-Din. This young charismatic figure - he was about thirty years old at the time - went from village to village, with shaven head and clothes discarded, announcing to the people that he had been sent by God to reform Islam. He also promised them that God would bring to an end the evil practices of existing rulers which included killing, pillaging and enslaving their subjects and that the latter would be spared such arduous tasks as planting grain. The people responded, according to a contemporary observer, by willingly laying down their tools to follow him.[69]

It was the duty of the king, Nasr al-Din insisted, to serve and protect his subjects. Moreover, he and his missionaries criticised rulers for not performing the canonical prayer regularly and correctly, for not limiting the number of their wives to four, and for associating with jugglers, musicians and others of dubious character. Furthermore, throughout his proselytizing campaigns Nasr al-Din emphasised that the End of Time was close at hand and that the Mahdi would soon appear to rid the world of injustice and oppression and ensure the triumph of Islam.[70]

This movement, although short lived, inspired other Torodbe-led holy wars which in the final analysis were as much about self-esteem, the overthrow of tyrannical rulers and control of the land as the reform of Islam. One such movement resulted in the creation of the Imamate of Bundu in the Senegambia in the late seventeenth century which was to survive for some two hundred years. Another jihad in Futa Jalon, likewise in the Senegambia, in the first half of the eighteenth century, also seems to have been motivated by the same concerns of identity and social integration. In the words of one authority, these rootless masses of the northern Senegambia led by their clerics:

> "Thrust on by religious impulse. . .extricated themselves from a solitary minority position and emerged the dominant group in several societies in the Western Sudan." [71]

Islam undoubtedly served as a spring-board and refuge for these despised persons, who were dismissed by the wider society as "liars, cheats and beggars", and as fit for nothing but a life of slavery.[72] The Torodbe, who had no other means of expressing their needs and aspirations save through Islam, sought to change the public image of themselves and their followers as low caste beggars and slaves. This they did by, on the one hand, immersing themselves in that important craft, the Islamic sciences, a craft that, as we have seen, gave prestige and power, and one that also entailed the abandonment of the nomadic way of life for a sedentary life in the towns, and on the other by shunning what were considered by

high society in Futa Toro to be menial occupations such as fishing, tanning and blacksmithing. .

Thus, a formerly rootless people originally from the lowest strata of society and with no other common bond than their faith and the desire for their own homeland, clearly achieved quite remarkable results not only for Islam in the Western Sudan, providing as they did the inspiration behind virtually all the militant Islamic uprisings in the Senegambia in the period under review, but also for themselves. They acquired status and prestige as the leaders of the newly created Muslim societies. Yet, ironically, and as so often happens, as they achieved power and came in practice if not in theory to control the land, the Torodbe, in turn, conducted themselves as tyrants enslaving their subjects and generally displaying an arrogance towards non-Torodbe which generated strong opposition, sometimes in the form of counter-jihads. Indeed, the harshness of their rule makes it difficult for the historian to say whether in certain instances and for certain localities the trans-Atlantic slave trade, at its peak during this period, contributed to jihad or whether jihad in supplying a pool of slaves fuelled the trans-Atlantic slave trade.[73]

The emergence, then, of a warrior clerical class was one of the most significant changes to take place in West African Islam between 1500-1800 and made for a significant change in relations between state and mosque. While, as already indicated, there were a number of scholar-prophets around the end of the fifteenth century who saw it as their duty to give advice to governments and warn them of the consequences of straying from the teachings of the Qur'an, a position endorsed by al-Suyuti and al-Maghili, the general body of Muslim scholars tended on the whole to obey the ruler and, in some of the less islamised areas, were even referred to as the chief's wife signalling their duty to respect and obey the ruler.[74] In line with the thinking of Ibn Khaldun, the Muslim cleric in the West African setting was a councillor, a conciliator, a peacemaker, not a politician.[75] However, by the end of the eighteenth century in certain Muslim communities, as already noted, this image

of the cleric was no longer the rule as more became increasingly militant in their attitude toward lax Muslim rulers and lands in which Muslims lived under non-Muslim rule.

There was also an important demographic change in this period which not only affected the social character of Islam but also assisted the growth of a more militant Muslim clerical class and is, therefore, deserving of note here. This change consisted of the movement of Islam, very largely until then an urban phenomenon, to the rural areas. As an urban phenomenon Islam had little concern for the lot of the peasants and the pastoralist and those in occupational crafts, or for those whom Iliffe terms the "very poor" or "destitute", the majority of whom were found in the rural areas.[76]

However, as Islam moved with the expansion of trade and commerce into the countryside during the period under review and began to appeal to the peasantry and pastoralist whose lot, as we shall see, was often an extremely difficult one, the Muslim cleric was obliged both to articulate the many grievances of these people and to emphasise the social message of Islam, if he was to gain their allegiance and support. Thus, the leader of the jihad in Hausaland, Uthman b. Fudi blamed the Hausa rulers for:

> "taking the people's beast of burden without their permission".[77]

Further north the jihadist Shehu Ahmadu Lobbo, less well educated than Uthman b. Fudi but deeply attached to Fulani pastoralist values, made his stand against the government of Masina in the province of Sebera, in the Middle Niger region, which had the highest proportion of castes and slaves in the kingdom.[78] By the early nineteenth century when the Sokoto jihad in northern Nigeria was launched the countryside had become the home of opposition to government so much so that during the period under review not a single Muslim reformer came from an urban and/ or highly commercial centre or capital city under a strong ruler, nor did they have any firm attachments to urban political or commercial interest groups, relying as they did for their support almost entirely on the rural areas which they mobilised against the central government.[79]

The Sokoto jihad and Islamic millenarianism in Nigeria.

The nineteenth century witnessed what has already been described above as a neo-mahdist craze in the western Sudan. Moreover, millenarianism was at this time, in the words of one authority:

> "the single most important theme in popular Muslim thought in West Africa".[80]

The nineteenth century largely overlapped with the thirteenth Muslim century which, as already stated, began in 1785 and ended in 1882 and proved to be a century of intense ferment not only in Nigeria and West Africa but in many parts of the Muslim world, a ferment generated in part by Napoleon's attack on Egypt (1798). This attack was followed by the Wahhabi takeover in the Hijaz in 1803 and the birth of numerous new, more populist Sufi brotherhoods including the Tijaniyya in Algeria which had a direct influence on millenarian developments in Western Africa and Nigeria.[81]

During the first decade of the nineteenth century Nigeria witnessed what many would consider to have been one of the most thorough-going examples of jihad in the history of Islam in West Africa.[82] Mahdism was a prominent theme in this jihad (1804-08) waged by Shaykh Uthman b. Fudi (1754-1817), and was also present, although to a lesser extent, in the jihad in Masina in the Middle Niger region in the 1820s, led by the above mention Ahmadu Lobbo, and in the long drawn-out holy war (1852-64) in the middle and upper reaches of the same river carried on by Al-Hajj Umar al-Futi (1794-1864).[83]

All three jihadists, it should be remembered, were Torodbe clerics. Uthman b. Fudi, our main concern here since his beliefs and activities have a direct bearing on the development of a tradition of Mahdism and renewal in Nigerian Islam, was, as previously mentioned, of the Toronkawa clan, the name given to the Torodbe in Hausaland. His ancestors had begun to migrate to Hausaland from the Senegambia in the fifteenth century.

Although the initiator of one of the most successful jihads in the history of West Africa, Uthman b. Fudi does not appear to have been militant either by temperament or inclination;

he was much more a man of letters than an activist. In possession of a large library he read many of the classical Islamic treatises, including those of al-Bukhari and al-Ghazali, on Islamic law, tradition and mysticism. He also travelled widely meeting many scholars including Shaykh Sidi al-Mukhti al-Kunti al-Kabir whose influence on Islam in the Western Sudan has already been mentioned.

As to the literary legacy of al-Suyuti and al-Maghili and its impact on the thinking of these jihadists this is most noticeable in the case of Uthman b. Fudi who quoted from the works of both scholars in his own writings. In one of his treatises he referred to al-Suyuti's list of twelve caliphs and expressed the hope that he would be the eleventh caliph and the Mahdi the last one.[84]

Al-Maghili probably exercised an even stronger intellectual and spiritual influence over Uthman b.Fudi than al-Suyuti. Not only did Uthman lay great store by al-Maghili's treatises on government and reform but he clearly felt a close spiritual bond with him due most probably to the fact that they both belonged to the Qadiriyya order.[85] In 1813 Uthman wrote of his debt to al-Maghili:

> "We have come across - praise be to God - some of his writings and have derived benefit from them. . .may God reward him well for them and unite us with him in the most exalted gardens of Paradise. Amen!."[86]

Many other works of Uthman bear the imprint of al-Maghili the militant reformer and millenialist. In his treatise, Kitab al-farq, on the differences between a Muslim government and a government of "unbelievers" Uthman b.Fudi, in a manner reminiscent of al-Maghili, lists the failings of the non-Muslim rulers of Hausaland whom he accuses of taking bribes, of failing to observe the shari'a, of imposing uncanonical taxes and of compelling Muslims to serve in non-Muslim armies.[87] In his Ta'lim al-ikhwan he condemns as unlawful such practices of the Hausa as divination by sand, by the stars or by spirits, and the veneration of trees and rocks on which libations are poured or sacrifices performed.[88] And in his jihad manifesto, the Wathiqat ahl al-Sudan, Uthman echoes al-Maghili once more when

instructing his followers that it is obligatory for a Muslim to take over the government of a land where the ruler, a Muslim, abandons Islam for what Uthman calls "heathendom".[89] Again on the question of the Renewer or Mujaddid he cites al-Maghili in his Siraj al-ikhwan (1811):

> "And accordingly it is related that at the beginning of every century God will send a learned man to the people to renew their faith, and the characteristics of this learned man in every century must be that he commands what is right and forbids what is disapproved of, and reforms the affairs of the people and judges justly between them, and assists the oppressed against the oppressor."[90]

This work also contains lengthy quotations from al-Maghili's Replies, previously referred to, on the unjust sultan who levies uncanonical taxes, and on the Hausa propensity to "mix" Islam and paganism.

However, while clear and decisive in his mind about what should be done about such evils as "mixing" and related matters Uthman b. Fudi was highly ambivalent about Mahdism. He was clearly a believer in the imminent appearance of the Mahdi prior to launching his jihad in 1804. According to one authority the Shaykh constantly preached to his followers on such subjects as the nearness of death, the torments of hell fire that lay in store for the wrong doer and the need consequently for repentance, and the rewards of paradise for those who followed the prophet's way. However, while such preaching won the hearts and minds of his listeners, what in Hiskett's view ultimately gained him a following was:

> "...his constant assurance that the Mahdi was coming and his pointing out the signs of the approaching End of Time."[91]

Uthman's enthusiasm for the mahdist cause apparently knew no bounds before and during the jihad for:

> "In the books written (by Uthman) before 1808...traditions about the approaching End of Time were copiously quoted without any attempt to distinguish between the authentic and the spurious."[92]

And the following passage shows that he had even come to regard himself as the Mahdi figure:

> "Know that I have also been given the attributes of the Mahdi...He is appointed to office at a time of upheaval, truly during it did I obtain office. When injustice has become excessive, he is made to appear; indeed I have also appeared at a time of tyranny. He is made to appear during religious degeneration; at such a time have I appeared..."[93]

However, Shaykh Uthman b. Fudi wrote and spoke less and less about the idea after the main battles of his holy war had been fought and won. He even went so far as to confess that he had been mistaken in believing that the End of Time was nigh and the Mahdi was about to appear, telling his listeners:

> " What we used to mention again and again during the gatherings for preaching that the time for the appearance of the Mahdi had come was based on the assumption of al-Suyuti. But after investigation we admit that we do not know the time with any certainty."[94]

He also explicitly rejected the claim made by some of his followers that he himself was the Mahdi when on one occasion he began his address to them with the following words:

> "Know my brethren that I am not the Mahdi even though that is heard from the tongues of other people."[95]

He then spelled out for them the characteristics that the Mahdi must possess: he must be a descendent of Fatima, be born in Medina, bear prophet Muhammad's name and his father, the name of prophet Muhammad's father.

Despite Shaykh Uthman's attempts to put an end to speculation about the coming of the Mahdi the belief persisted among his followers. His son and successor as Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammad Bello, told his subjects that his father had told him that the community would:

> "emigrate to these regions (the East) to meet the Mahdi and pay him homage".[96]

So convinced was Muhammad Bello of the imminent appearance of the Mahdi that he even went as far as to send troops to the eastern Sudan, to Dar Fur and Wadai, to see if there was any news about the "expected Mahdi".[97]

Many Muslims, furthermore, emigrated East in the nineteenth century of their own accord in expectation of the Mahdi. One, Ibrahim Sharif al-Din, a jurist, on his way through Northern Nigeria to Mecca in 1856-57, was allegedly followed by so many people in

search of the Mahdi that the population of the region was substantially diminished.[98] Besides, there were several attempts to establish mahdist states in northern Nigeria itself in the last quarter of the nineteenth century many of them inspired by the advent of Muhammad Ahmad b. Abdullah of the Turko-Egyptian Sudan who proclaimed himself the Mahdi in 1881 and established what was perhaps the most thoroughgoing mahdist state in the history of Islam.[99]

Thus, there can be little doubt about the strength and persistence of the mahdist belief in Nigerian and West African Islam in the nineteenth century and once again the main carrier of the idea was the Muslim scholar who almost always belonged to a Sufi order and operated from a rural base.

Colonial rule and Islamic millenarianism in Nigeria

The incidence of Mahdism and the threat it posed during colonial rule in former British and French West Africa have possibly been exaggerated. In former British West Africa, for example, the colonial regime was never faced with a mahdist threat as serious as that presented to the colonial regime in eastern Africa by Muhammad Abdallah Hassan, the "Mullah of Somaliland", more popularly known as the "Mad Mullah", who led a jihad for some twenty years against "Christian colonization."[100]

However, chastened by their experience in the Sudan, British colonial administrators in northern Nigeria, and in particular those in the more distant parts of the north-eastern and north-western regions of the country, tended to see all Muslim opposition as inspired by mahdist elements and Mahdism itself as the natural expression of anti-colonialism. Likewise, the French who encountered numerous Islamic resistance movements led by charismatic Muslim leaders including the above mentioned al-Hajj Umar al-Futi were inclined to see the hand of Mahdism wherever there was militant opposition to their rule.[101] This over-reaction to Mahdism not withstanding, the early years of colonial rule in northern Nigeria witnessed numerous mahdist uprisings, some spontaneous and very transitory, and

others well organised and difficult to suppress. Two of the better organised mahdist uprisings were at Bormi (1903) on the banks of the river Gongola in north-eastern Nigeria and Satiru (1906), twelve miles to the south of Sokoto in the north-west.[102] Another centre of mahdist activity was at Dumbulwa near the town of Fika, also in the north-east of the country.

The Dumbulwa mahdist community under the leadership of Shaykh Sa'id b. Hayatu, of the Toronkawa clan of the Fulani, grew rapidly in the space of three years from no more than a handful of rural Fulani in 1919 to over three thousand by 1923, the year in which the British arrested the Shaykh and deported him to the Cameroon. Shaykh Sa'id was officially released from detention in 1959 and settled in Kano, the headquarters of Nigerian Mahdism.[103]

Despite exile and opposition from the Muslim establishment Shaykh Sa'id remained convinced that the Mahdi had come in the person of the Mahdi of the Sudan and wrote to this effect in 1957:

> "The idea of the Mahdi is well known in Islam all over the world. . .Shaykh Uthman (leader of the Sokoto jihad) confirmed on an authentic chain of authority that there would be no other authentic reformer from him until the time of the Mahdi. . .Muhammad Bello (son of Uthman b.Fudi) said at the battle of Yandoto 'I will tell you what the Shehu has been telling me about the nearness of the period in which the Mahdi will appear'. When they heard this they were delighted and put much more effort into the battle, morally and financially. . .Muhammad Bello said in his book...that the Mahdi would appear fifty seven years after the death of Uthman. The Shaykh died in 1232 (A.H.). Therefore the Mahdi appeared in 1280..The Shaykh said that allegiance to the Mahdi was necessary..."[104]

These uprisings, those over the border in Niger against the French, the fear of the post World War I pan-Islamic movement and the rapid growth of the Dumbulwa mahdist community, prompted the colonial administration in Nigeria to undertake an in depth study of Mahdism in the region. The investigation reached the conclusion that Mahdism was "a political problem of the first importance".[105]

Mahdist inspired revolts continued well into the 1920s. Commenting on mahdist uprisings

Tomlinson and Lethem, the two senior officers appointed to investigate the force and scope of Mahdism in Nigeria, stated:

> "These outbreaks of religious fanaticism. . .are due to the influence of the Sokoto jihad and Burmi Mahdism...they are strikingly critical of the European government and there appears to be a strong desire to oust the Europeans".[106]

It was not only colonialism as a negative political and cultural phenomenon that was to act as a catalyst for Mahdism but also the opportunities, and the improvements that it brought with it in, for example, communications; the railways linking southern and northern Nigeria, Chad and the Sudan enabled more Muslims from Nigeria and West Africa as a whole to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. In this way Mahdists from many different regions could exchange ideas and spread their message more widely. It was estimated that some 80,000 West African Muslims were to be found in the Sudan at any one time, all on the road to Mecca, a long road that could take as much as ten years to travel before the hajj was completed. Another 10,000 or so were scattered about Egypt, the Hijaz and elsewhere.[107]

Some of these pilgrims stayed for a time in mahdist villages and we have some idea of their socio-economic background, what they discussed and the type of information and literature which they brought back with them. A frequent topic of conversation was the deplorable state of Islam, the treachery of those Muslim rulers who had collaborated with the Christian infidel, the colonial administration. And the view was widespread that in order to defeat imperialism Islam would first have to be reformed.

The anti-colonial, anti-Muslim establishment themes are even stronger in the mahdist literature. A mahdist poem in circulation in Northern Nigeria in the 1920s violently condemned the existing Muslim establishment, the foreigner and modern ways. However, all would be put right by the Renewer of Islam.[108]

As we have seen, the British administration attempted to curtail the influence of Mahdism in Nigeria by deporting its leading exponent, Sa'id b. Hayatu, to the Cameroon in 1923

and although less frequent from this time onwards mahdist uprisings, nevertheless, continued. Moreover, the old Muslim city of Kano became a refuge for Mahdists from all over northern Nigeria and for those hounded out of bordering states under French administration.

Mahdist ideas, however, did not respect colonial boundaries; Mahdists in Nigeria gave support to those in Niger and even as far afield as Morocco and the Hijaz and the converse was also the case. And with the increasing influence of the Wahhabi and Reformed Tijani movements in West Africa, Mahdists, wherever they were to be found, intensified their appeal for the destruction of the Antichrist, the colonial regime, and its alleged ally the traditional Muslim hierarchy.

The economic depression of the 1930s, the growing influence of the Reformed Tijaniyya - there was a tradition that the Mahdi would emerge from the Tijaniyya[109] - Wahhabi radicalism, what was perceived by many Muslims as the humiliation of their emirs, who passively accepted their dethronement by colonial administrators, and World War II, all did much to keep the appeal of Mahdism alive. And for some, the advent of the Mahdi was close at hand. A Nigerian Mahdist from Kano wrote in 1941:

> "There is clear evidence indicating the imminent appearance of the Mahdi. Among the proofs is the coming of the Europeans to Hausaland. Emirs have no powers but they go to Kaduna (colonial headquarters for Northern Nigeria)...the Mahdi will come very soon...Emirs go to Kaduna like sheep".[110]

A year later in 1942, further south in the Yoruba town of Ijebu-Ode, Muhammad Jumat Imam proclaimed himself the Mahdi-Messiah and founded a mahdist movement of the kind that we know little about in the Nigerian context in that, far from being militant and extremist in terms of its methods and doctrines sought, through peaceful means, reconciliation between Muslim and Muslim and Muslim and Christian.

However, before moving to a discussion of the methods and aims of the Mahdiyya movement of Ijebu-Ode, this present chapter can usefully be brought to an end with an

overview of the social composition of Islamic millenarian movements, especially but not exclusively in the West African /Nigerian context, and the spiritual and ideological dimension of the belief in the advent of the Mahdi, the God-guided one, and the Renewer.

The social constituency of Islamic millenarianism.

Mahdism, or Islamic millenarianism became a widely-used popular method of responding to injustice and oppression. As Macdonald expressed it:

> "The more the Muslim masses have felt themselves oppressed and humiliated either by their own rulers or by non-Muslims, the more fervent has been their longing for this ultimate restorer of the true Islam and conqueror of the whole world for Islam. And as the need for a Mahdi has been felt, the Mahdi has always appeared and Islam has risen, sword in hand, under their banner."[111]

As already noted, both al-Ghazali, scholar, teacher and mystic, and Ibn Khaldun, likewise a scholar, and also very much an aristocrat, statesman, and establishment figure, stressed the popular character of this belief. The "stupid" masses, Ibn Khaldun informed his readers, make claims about the Mahdi, "unguided by any intelligence or helped by any knowledge" and assume that he will appear in a variety of circumstances and places, mostly in remote areas out of the reach of ruling dynasties and outside their authority. Moreover, according to Ibn Khaldun the "unenlightened" masses took their belief in the advent of the Mahdi extremely seriously even to the point of dying for it:

> "Many weak minded people go to these places to support a deceptive cause that the human soul in its delusion and stupidity leads them to believe capable of succeeding. Many of them have been killed."[112]

Thus, Ibn Khaldun in particular leaves little doubt that these chiliastic ideas appealed above all to the educationally disadvantaged, and the poor, who were more often than not the same people. But can we be more precise about the social constituency of Islamic millenarianism in West Africa and in particular in Nigeria?

The leadership of mahdist and renewal movements, it has already been noted, consisted in the main of individuals who at one and the same time were other-worldly Sufis, scholars of varying educational achievement, and frustrated tribesmen. Few were politicians or

successful business people, and almost all either lived at some distance from the main centres of power and influence, or withdrew to rural enclaves, sometimes as a sign of their distaste for or opposition to the existing political authorities.

Moreover, what is known about their personal life style suggests that they lived very modestly, and even in some cases in poverty. According to tradition Uthman b. Fudi, the Hausa reformer, possessed but one pair of trousers and one cap, and made a living from rope making, a poor man's occupation.[113] Modest living could be a valuable asset to any would-be reformer, especially for one who enjoyed a high reputation for learning.

However, not all Muslim scholars were poor; some had even amassed considerable wealth.[114] And paradoxically while the possession of great wealth by scholars ran counter to the ideal way of life of the Muslim cleric, and especially one who was also a mystic, its loss may well have been one of the principal underlying causes of the nineteenth century jihads or holy wars mentioned above. Writing of the scholars of Timbuktu in this connection Saad suggests that:

> "...an erosion of the status of the scholar there, along with a decline in the mercantile interests of their class, may lie at the background of the nineteenth century jihads."[115]

The following acquired by reformers was made up in large measure by Muslim students who lived in the main by begging. Shaykh Ahmadu Lobbo the leader of the reform movement in Masina was surrounded by such student "undesirables."[116] Of course, beggars were not necessarily among the very poor and/ or destitute; for the most part the category of the "very poor", it will be shown below, was comprised of the physically incapacitated and those without family and/or institutional support in times of extreme hardship or need such as famine. Otherwise the vast majority of people were poor making it somewhat meaningless to conclude that millenarians came from their ranks. This not withstanding, recent historical research by Iliffe, among others, on the poor in Africa not only makes a useful distinction between different types of poor and different types of poverty there

but also highlights the lack in many African societies of institutions and networks to assist the poor, and where these were seriously lacking millenarianism tended to thrive.

Iliffe distinguishes between the ordinary poor and the very poor and/ or destitute. The former he defines as those who are obliged to strive continuously to preserve themselves and their dependents from physical want. The destitute are those who, despite their struggle, have fallen into physical want and indeed are never free from it. Usually they are, as previously noted, seriously incapacitated in one form or another or victims of political or climatic insecurity, or those experiencing poverty and who for various reasons either could not benefit from the largess of the wealthy or lacked the support of a family or community.[117]

As to the kinds of poverty that existed and exist to this day in Africa, Iliffe, basing himself on Gutton, makes a distinction between structural and what he terms conjunctural poverty.[118] Structural poverty is long term and due to an individual's circumstances such as serious disablement or lack of access to labour, while conjunctural poverty is that poverty which affects ordinarily self-sufficient people, is temporary and is brought on by some crisis or other.[119]

Wherever one looks from the Senegal flood plain in the north of West Africa southward to Hausaland or eastward across the Sahel there were large numbers of very poor, the majority in the pastoral, rural communities, and some of them suffered from structural poverty, incapacitated as they were by leprosy or blindness or some other serious physical handicap or illness. There was also destitution among the able-bodied - the hunters, herders, cultivators and labourers - many of whom were slaves whose lives clearly were extremely insecure in a society where demand for labour was high.

Famine accounted for much of the "conjunctural poverty" and was not infrequent in Senegal and elsewhere in West Africa from the 1680s through to the nineteenth century and beyond, and that major famines occurred at the height of the nineteenth century Islamic

reform movement, 1790-1830, is clearly relevant to any explanation of the rise and persistence of mahdist movements then. However, although the effects of famine on the moral as on every other aspect of peoples' lives should not be minimised, one cannot safely posit a direct causal link between famine and the militant struggle for the transformation of society in every instance for, as already pointed out, it was sometimes this militancy that gave rise to famine, and indeed to a host of other evils from cattle epidemics, to plague, to insecurity, enslavement and physical handicap.

While, then, the degree of poverty was uneven from one West African society to another it existed in some measure everywhere. In Hausaland which was by no means the worst-affected area there were pockets of extreme poverty and little in the way of measures to alleviate it. The reason for this indigence varied from banditry, to slave-raiding, to political insecurity, to such disasters as cattle epidemics, drought and famine. Naturally, those most adversely affected took whatever precautions they could against misfortune and deprivation from rain-making rites, to methods of energy-preservation, to selling themselves into slavery, to migration to what appeared to be the better protected urban areas.

But generally, as we have seen, safety nets for the very poor were virtually non-existent even in the towns; to be very poor and/ or destitute was for the most part synonymous with being without support. The family was not always the strong support that is often imagined, yet along with the system of zakat or almsgiving, where implemented, and individual generosity, it was the only real protection available.[120]

Moreover, as the reformer Uthman b. Fudi protested, even in relatively wealthy Hausaland, the better-off often proved ungenerous to the poor. Indeed, Uthman b. Fudi was convinced that the "evil situation" that was to prefigure the advent of the Mahdi in which "men will beg from the rich in vain" had arrived.[121] Moreover, governments, far from collecting and distributing zakat in accordance with shari'a (canon law), imposed instead extra uncanonical tax on its subjects. This exploitation ensured the support of the common people not only

for Uthman b. Fudi in the early nineteenth century but also for reform and mahdist movements before and since.[122] Writing of the appeal of mahdist leaders in north-eastern Nigeria and the northern Cameroon in this century Lacroix noted that:

> ". . .all essentially found their Fulbe adepts among the common people and tributary populations. All, too, put in the first rank of the 'Enemies of God' the 'Bad Chiefs' and the 'doctors' devoted to them and denounced not only the heresies of which they accused them, but also their rapacity and the abuses it led to, thus externalising the conflicts latent in the society".[123]

A category which, although not destitute, was, nonetheless, sufficiently marginal, detached and free to constitute an additional source of recruitment for any would-be prophet or Mahdi were the beggars, of whom there were vast numbers dispersed throughout the region. Many of these beggars, as previously pointed out, were students and came from societies in which "youthful violence was expected and institutionalised".[124] These rootless, educated young people, were potentially the most radical social group in pre-colonial West Africa and it is not surprising to find that they were among the followers of the leaders of the jihads.[125]

However, although the reformers showed great concern for the over-taxed peasants and their like at the outset, little was done to change things once power had been acquired with their help. Uthman b. Fudi and his successors as caliphs in Sokoto never made any formal provision for the care and treatment of the blind, the disabled or the mentally disturbed. Yet, they condemned and sought to outlaw, albeit not with much success, traditional therapies such as the Bori cult to which women, who along with children seem to have been the main victims of serious illnesses, had recourse.

Moreover, where the society was highly stratified, and such societies were not uncommon, it was not only the poverty that hurt but also the social deprivation experienced as a result of being poor. As Iliffe expresses it:

> "Savanna Muslims viewed poverty with much ambivalence. Their traditions stress the values of wealth and generosity. . .At their best, these traditions evoked the largess of the rich and the hospitality of the common people. . .At their worst, the

> same traditions bred contempt for poverty, both in others, expressed sometimes in mockery of the handicapped, and in oneself, for the shame of poverty could lead men (but apparently not women) to suicide. .. Savanna Muslims lived too close to poverty to idealise it. 'Beg from a beggar and you will see the blackest miserliness", said a Hausa proverb. 'Poverty you hate and are hated for it', added the Fulani."[126]

Iliffe not only maintains that there was much contempt for slaves and victims of poverty generally in Hausaland and elsewhere but also that considerations of status were important even to the reformers and mahdist leaders; Muhammad Bello of the Sokoto Caliphate included slave origin among the disgraces of which the Hausa rulers that he overthrew were guilty.[127] The castes, blacksmiths, butchers, cattle traders and griots or praise singers, fared little better. The latter were attacked by Uthman b. Fudi, the leader of the Sokoto jihad, as "gens de plaisir" and were widely known as those "towards whom every insult is permitted".[128]

In Western Africa, then, raw, naked, "lonely" destitution and sickness were integral to the millenarian milieu, as they were in the Sudan.[129] And scholarly analysis of the causes of the most recent outbreak in the early 1980s of militant millenarian fervour in northern Nigeria in the form of the Maitatsine riots in which an estimated six thousand people lost their life indicates that for the "very poor" little has changed.[130] Once again the mainstay of this mahdist movement were the displaced and marginalized, those in the classic occupations taken up by the "floating labour pool" - street vendors, water carriers and so on all of whom were among the "lonely poor" who lacked the welfare institutions to enable them to escape from destitution.

Members of the Maitatsine movement were experiencing much greater difficulties in obtaining employment and shelter as the oil boom of the late 1960s and early 1970s in Nigeria collapsed leaving the wealthier section of the population which traditionally employed and housed the less fortunate without the means to retain their services. Moreover, traditional places of shelter such as in the porticoes of the grand dwellings of the rich were no longer an option for the poor as the mounting crime wave led the former

to install high walls and fences and ever greater security precautions to protect their property. In this and other ways the little that existed in the form of a protection against dire poverty was removed.[131]

Thus, the appeal of and the social constituency of Mahdism in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial West Africa and Nigeria were in large measure determined by the following interrelated variables: the existence of a disaffected clerical class outside of and antagonistic to governments that were seen to exploit and oppress the masses, a pool of students and young people who were expected to be militant, and sizeable numbers of very poor who for the most part possessed no representative institutions or channels by means of which they could express their grievances or obtain redress. We will now consider what such people hoped to gain by supporting Mahdis and Renewers and, of equal importance for an understanding of millenarianism, what the latter sought from them.

Aims and achievements of Islamic millenarianism

What struck Ibn Khaldun most of all about Mahdism was its capacity to unify and restore "asabiyya" or group feeling. He wrote of how the family of the prophet Muhammad had lost its authority and power in a situation and at a time when:

> "the group feeling of the Quraysh (the clan of Muhammad) has everywhere disappeared".[132]

Without "asabiyya", or group feeling, he maintained, no religious or political propaganda could be successful. Commenting on the potential of the mahdist idea to restore a sense of solidarity to the Quraysh he wrote:

> " If it is correct that a Mahdi is to appear there is only one way for his propaganda to make its appearance. He must be one of them, and God must unite them in the intention to follow him, until he gathers enough strength and group feeling to gain success for his cause and to move people to support him. Any other way. . .(for example) by merely relying on the relationship to the family of Muhammad - will not be feasible or successful."[133]

There is much evidence from Nigeria and West Africa generally to show that the belief in the Mahdi and /or the Renewer was made to serve the same purposes: to galvanise support and to foster "group feeling" for the purpose of renewing Islam in preparation for the approaching End of Time. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century it was made, as already indicated, to serve Torodbe "asabiyya", as this collection of once despised peoples struggled to establish its identity as a group. Moreover, although Uthman b. Fudi preached against ethnicity, his reform movement like others of the nineteenth century and previously, in some measure served this same purpose.[134]

In the colonial period Mahdism was often used as a weapon against the infidel and as such tended to draw together Muslims regardless of ethnic background. Al-Hajj Umar al-Futi, mentioned above, waged holy war for the expansion and reform of Islam and against French penetration in Senegal and in the middle and upper Niger regions for almost a decade in the mid-nineteenth century.

He is known to have preached about the Mahdi at a time when the very survival of his jihad was at stake. The occasion was in 1854 when the French laid seige to the Senegalese city of Medine. Not only did he lose two thousand men on this occasion but many of the survivors deserted the jihad causing him to intensify his rhetoric and to make the following Cromwellian like appeal to the remaining followers to stay loyal and await the Mahdi:

> "I swear by the highest authority that the army is foreordained by Him who created the seven heavens and the seven earths, and that it cannot be destroyed by infidels or hypocrites or libertines until the coming of the Imam, Muhammad the Mahdi".[135]

Umar's jihad survived this set-back and there was little more to be heard of the Mahdi from his lips or his pen although his lieutenants continued to make use of the notion to enhance his prestige and frighten his opponents into submission. One, Muhammad B. Ahmad b. Aqia, of the previously mentioned Tuareg Kel el-Suq spoke of him as the Mahdi while another announced that he was one of the Mahdi's three wazirs or ministers and had

been entrusted with responsibility for the Maghrib or West.[136]

Al-Hajj Umar is not the only example of a militant Muslim reformer in nineteenth century West Africa to use the Mahdi notion to generate support, foster unity among his followers and fire them with zeal for the cause at hand, the purification and triumph of Islam. The millenarian theme figured prominently, as was shown, in the build up to the Sokoto jihad only to be dampened down after victory seemed assured.

Militant Mahdism, thus, had considerable potential not only as an instrument for fostering unity but also for destabilising an unpopular or rival regime, and this reformers recognised once in power. Reforming regimes did little or nothing in the long term to solve the problems of destitution which gave rise to millenarianism. Slaves who were promised their freedom if they supported the reform movement were indeed often set free, but no effort was made once the holy war had been won to abolish the system of slavery itself.

Conclusions

Reform movements built around millenarian hopes and expectations achieved much in the way of forging identities, spreading Islam and centralising power but did little to challenge the traditional order. The idea of allowing individuals to step out of what were considered to be their "natural roles" would have constituted a radical if not revolutionary challenge to the social order, something which the reformers appeared to be able to contemplate in that liminal period prior to the reform itself when all seemed possible, but not in the aftermath of victory when it was time for consolidation.

Thus, slave systems and caste systems remained as did much else that was characteristic of the pre-reform period, including the importance of past Islamic history, the conflict between scholars and rulers and marginal and dominant groups, the lack of formal and adequate provisions to protect the very poor and the sick and in this respect the Nigerian and wider West African mahdist milieu were not notably different from that of Medieval

Europe where:

> "Revolutionary millenarianism drew its strength from a population living on the margins of society - peasants without land or with too little land even for subsistence; journeymen and unskilled workers living under the continuous threat of unemployment; beggars and vagabonds - in fact from the amorphous mass of people who were not simply poor but who could find no assured and recognised place in society at all."[137].

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3. Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History, (trans from the Arabic by F. Rosenthal), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958, Vol. II, chap.3, sections 50-51, pp. 156 ff.

4. Macdonald, in SEI, (eds) Gibb and Kramers op. cit., p. 311.

5. Macdonald, "Al-Mahdi", in E.I, op. cit., p. 115.

6. Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, op.cit., Vol.II, chap. 3 p. 156.

7. For a brief overview of Mahdism and Mahdis see J. A. Williams, (ed) Themes of Islamic Civilization, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982 pp. 191 ff.

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9. Macdonald, "Al-Mahdi" in SEI, (eds) Gibb and Kramers, op. cit., p. 311.

10. Arjomand, The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam, op. cit., especially chap. 2. See also: Macdonald op. cit.

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14. Ibid. p. 35.

15. Ibid. p. 36.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid. pp. 39 ff.

18. Citation from op. cit., p. 39.

19. Ibid. pp. 39 ff.

20. Ibid. p. 43.

21. Ibid. chaps. 2&3.

22. Ibn Khaldun, The Muqadimmah, op. cit., Vol.II, chap. 3 pp. 156 ff.

23. M. A. Al-Hajj, "The Thirteenth Century in Muslim Eschatology: Mahdist Expectations in the Sokoto Caliphate", in Research Bulletin, Institute of African Studies, Centre for Arabic Documentation, University of Ibadan, (henceforth RBCAD, Ibadan University), Vol. 3 No. 2nd July 1967, pp. 100-116.

24. Macdonald, "Al-Mahdi", in SEI (eds) Gibb and Kramers (eds), op.cit., p. 313.

25. On the part played by both Al-Suyuti and Al-Maghili in the development of an Islamic tradition of reform in the western Sudan see: Shari'a in Songhay: The Replies of Al-Maghili to the Questions of Askia Al-Hajj Muhammad, (edited and translated with an introduction and commentary by J.O. Hunwick), Oxford: Oxford University Press and published for the British Academy, 1985. (Henceforth: Hunwick, Shari'a in Songhay)

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27. The citation is from ibid. p. 115

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32. Ibid. p. 27

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34. Ibid. p. 115-16.

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42. Ibid. p. 66.

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Chapter 2: Religion and Society in Ijebuland

Having traced the development of both the mahdist idea and the interrelated notion of renewal and/or regeneration in West African and in particular Nigerian Islam, and its appeal and application there, we now turn to that reservoir of beliefs and practices, the old and new religious world of the Ijebu, upon which Muhammad Jumat Imam, the founder of the Mahdiyya movement, was to draw as he mapped out his path toward becoming the self proclaimed Mahdi-Messiah.

An understanding of these beliefs and practices is a necessary part of the explanation of this prophet's success in promptly gaining a following in 1942 from both within and outside the Muslim community in Ijebuland for, as Worsley points out:

> "The nature of the values held by the mass of his followers is...of prime significance in understanding how it is that charismatic leaders are able to mobilise support readily, or, in some cases, even to have support thrust upon them.."[1]

And without this understanding of the character and content of the traditional religious ideas of the Ijebu and of Ijebu Islam and Christianity it would be well nigh impossible to appreciate why people were disposed, if not always to accept, then to give serious consideration to the beliefs, and to the methods, both of which were derived from various sources - Muslim, Christian and Traditional - used by Muhammad Jumat Imam to uphold his claims to prophethood. A similar observation was made by Burridge who pointed out that:

> "If a prophet is to communicate, be accepted and recognised, he has to say and do things which are familiar and intelligible to his audience, and which will impress them".[2]

Although a Muslim reformer of considerable weight and authority among his own people, and one who publicly denounced "paganism" and the accommodating attitude of his fellow Muslims toward it, Muhammad Jumat Imam was, nevertheless, to draw upon some of those very same "pagan" ideas and practices and rework them so that they became part of the proof of what came to be considered, somewhat ironically, as "his own very deep

understanding" of the supernatural. Indeed, as this chapter will show, the furniture in his mental loft was of a variety of different makes - "pagan", Muslim, both orthodox and sectarian, and Christian, of both the mission and African independent church kind. These religious traditions although treated separately here for purpose of analysis were not totally separate and distinct. On the contrary for, as Parrinder stressed with reference to the effects of the interaction between Traditional religion and both Christianity and Islam in West Africa:

> " The mixed religion of today is as real as the paganism of yesterday and both must be studied."[3]

Moreover, following Horton whose views on Yoruba cosmology will be outlined below, this writer is persuaded that Traditional religion has much in common in terms of its of cosmology and in other respects with these two world religions.[4] However, a major difference between the three religions during the earlier part of the period - from c.1890-1930 - covered in this study lay in the extent to which Traditional religion more than the other two religions under discussion necessarily performed the role of a social psychology chiefly by operating as a system of explanation, prediction and control of space-time events and thereby providing adherents with a system of ideas and practices that enabled them to understand and to a degree regulate their relationship with their world. This theme of religion as a social psychology will be touched upon again. But such a discussion, as with much else in this chapter, calls first of all for a brief outline of the character of these three religions in the Ijebu context, beginning with the Traditional religion.

It is intended, therefore, that what follows will provide some useful insights into the making of the prophet's mind and the necessary background for an understanding of the religious outlook of the people whose response to the supernatural claims of one of their own is, as chapter six makes clear, a central part of our enquiry.

<u>The traditional cosmos</u>.

Ijebuland is among the oldest of the Yoruba kingdoms and its capital is, fittingly, in the centre of the kingdom at Ijebu-Ode. As to the origins of the capital city, there are myths which speak of three sets of migrants to Ijebu-Ode, the last group to settle there arriving from the legendary centre of the universe, Ile-Ife, under the leadership of Obanta the mythical, first awujale or king of the Ijebu.[5]

Ijebu-Ode is certainly several hundred years old. It was described in the early sixteenth century Portuguese sources as a, "large town called Geebuu, surrounded by a very large ditch".[6] This mud-built ditch or rampart (eredo) with its circuit of eighty miles was, according to legend, the creation of Shungbo, a wealthy but childless woman who caused it to be built as a memorial to herself. Meanwhile the eredo awaits archaeological investigation which could perhaps reveal both its architect and its purpose. As to its purpose, some regard it as a fortification, others see it as marking the boundaries of the awujale's (king's) jurisdiction - it encloses an area of some four hundred miles around the town of Ijebu-Ode - while others see it as fulfilling both functions.[7] And it was there that the future Mahdi-Messiah, Muhammad Jumat Imam, was born on a Friday, the exact date is unknown, in May 1896.

The traditional ruler of Ijebuland, the awujale or king, although he claimed authority over the whole kingdom was recognised as the first among a number of chiefs, some of whom were also crowned and exercised considerable autonomy and power either in the same town or in their local areas. The following chapter will show that by attempting to curtail these rights and strengthen the power of the centre, of the awujale, the British colonial administration gave rise to a crisis of royal legitimacy of unprecedented proportions which in turn created, perhaps more than anything else, a climate favourable to the millenarian dreams of Muhammad Jumat Imam.

Most of the kingdom lies in the tropical rain forests and at the height of its power its territory extended for between two and three thousand square miles. The north of the

kingdom, although less densely populated, has richer soil than the south, soil suitable for cocoa growing. Although mainly agriculturalists the Ijebu are also well known as traders and middle-men, something the Portuguese noted in the sixteenth century:

> "...and the trade which one can conduct here is trade in slaves, who are sold for brass bracelets, at a rate of twelve to fifteen bracelets for a slave, and in elephants' tusks".[8]

Even when the Oyo empire was at its strongest in the second half of the eighteenth century Ijebuland retained its independence. Furthermore, the Ijebu position was strengthened as the kingdom gained control not only of the trade in slaves and cloth between Lagos and the interior but also of the important firearms trade, at the same time closing its borders to any competition from outsiders.[9] This exclusivist policy which also applied to missionaries, both Muslim and Christian, as well as merchants, had the effect of ensuring that the Traditional religion remained until the last decades of the nineteenth century the only recognised religion in the kingdom. Further West in Abeokuta, by way of contrast, Christian missionaries had begun their work of evangelization in 1840 and further North a solid Muslim presence had been established in Ilorin and elsewhere.

Although there are variations in Yoruba belief and practice from one town or kingdom to another and without attempting to give to it a degree of systematization that it does not and never has possessed, it is the case that in broad outline and indeed in much of the specifics the Ijebu and what might be termed the traditional Yoruba cosmological view are identical.[10]

The Yoruba cosmos is one in which positive and negative forces are engaged in a contest to control the destiny of individuals. The notion of a saving power that has/or will destroy evil in the form of these negative forces is absent. What can be achieved is not the definitive and complete destruction of evil but its containment. In practice this idea of containment can result in a very narrowly-based ethical outlook. The family, or even the individual, concerned may not only attempt to satisfy the divinity in order to be protected

from evil but may even sacrifice to a god for the purpose of inflicting harm on another member of the wider community in order to preserve its own good fortune.

The greatest danger in this regard comes from the activities of witches who are almost always women of advanced years.[11] The witch's powers can pass from mother to daughter or can be given to non-relatives or even purchased. Everyone, including a person who has been alloted a "good destiny", can be the victim of witchcraft and, thus, good destiny does not dispense with the need to ensure that danger is kept at bay if success is to be achieved, success being measured in terms of wealth, peace, prosperity, longevity and children, full happiness only coming with the birth of children who will be responsible for one's burial.[12]

The creator of this cosmos in which good and evil forces compete is Olorun, owner of the sky, sometimes referred to as Olodumare, and portrayed as a somewhat distant supreme being who is loathe to intervene in human affairs.[13] Olorun is served by an uncountable number of highly active orisa or lesser divinities, some of whom are personifications of various natural features such as hills and trees, others of natural forces such the wind, thunder and lightning. There are also ancestral spirits and a variety of other categories of spiritual beings.[14]

While Olorun has no priesthood, temples or shrines, prayers and oferings are made in his honour and requesting his help. He has been likened by one Yoruba scholar to the paramount or principal chief of a kingdom who has little contact with his subjects, most of his dealings with the latter being carried on by his ministers, the lesser divinities or orisa.[15] In contrast with the supreme being the orisa who reside in orun, heaven, or the major ones at least, have their priests, shrines, rituals, taboos and cults with their own symbols, music, myths, and dances in every town and village.

Membership of a particular orisa cult was largely determined in pre-colonial times by descent, a person normally following the cult of the orisa of his parents. However, only

those called by the orisa were initiated and this would involve lengthy training and a deep emotional and spiritual transformation. The nineteenth century Church Missionary Society evangelist James White recounts how the divinity Gbuku at Igbessa had an initiation rite that was marked by vivid resurrection symbolism: the chosen one on being suddenly seized by this divinity became a lifeless corpse and disappeared to the spirit world for three months before being possessed and restored to life under dramatic circumstances.[16]

Such possession is mostly of women devotees, the cult of Shango, the Oyo divinity of thunder being an exception; here the priest or elegun - a man dressed in the clothes and hairstyle of a woman - is the one possessed.

Ritual is of three types: individual or private rites performed in the home in the early morning, regular rituals at the shrine of the god and the annual festivals which involve a procession to the royal palace to greet the ruler, bestow on him the blessings of the god and, of great relevance to this study, to symbolise the entire populations acceptance of his authority as legitimate. This symbolic act of acceptance and submission is an important point to bear in mind when the crisis of royal or awujale legitimacy which gave rise to that millenarian milieu in Ijebuland which Muhammad Jumat Imam exploited, is discussed in the following chapter.

Horton has attempted to systemise the Yoruba cosmology and account for the change in the Yoruba perception of the supreme being and the orisa, and also peoples' changing relationship with both, by constructing a two-tier Yoruba cosmology. He contends that during the pre-colonial period the supreme being, Olorun, who occupies the top tier and underpins the macrocosm was largely irrelevant and therefore ignored.[17] However, with the enlargement of scale resulting from the opening up of the traditional society to the outside world, principally through the introduction of wider trade and commercial networks, the supreme being became much more prominent in the thinking and day to day life of the people.

The bottom tier of this two-tier cosmological system as constructed by Horton is occupied by the lesser deities who played the dominant role in the more closed, small scale pre-colonial world, by underpinning the microcosm. With enlargement of scale their role in this sphere greatly diminished since what was now required was a supernatural reference point that was common to a much wider and far more diverse society. The lesser gods were too closely associated with particular communities to serve in this more neutral, open ended context.

In spite of its limitations which will be referred to below, Horton's analysis of Yoruba cosmology has the advantage of focusing attention on the traditional cosmology itself, often overlooked at the expense of emphasising the contribution of Islam and Christianity to African religious thought. However, before returning to Horton we can usefully consider several other ways of approaching Yoruba cosmology. There is, for example, the view that the distinction between heaven (orun) and the world or earth (aiye) is a fundamental aspect of the Yoruba world-view. Olorun, the divinities or orisa, lesser spirits and ancestors reside in "orun" while men, animals, sorcerers and witches inhabit "aiye". Mediating between these two worlds are the god of divination, Orunmila, and the unpredictable, insecure, trickster divinity Eshu.[18]

Others, among them Morton-Williams, have suggested a threefold universe: heaven (orun), the world (aiye) and the earth (ile), the latter being associated with the ancestors and the Ogboni and Oro cults.[19] While this structure may provide a more theoretically complete and correct version of Yoruba thought the heaven (orun)/ earth (aiye) distinction is undoubtedly a very important one. It is important, for example, for an understanding of what have proved to be some of the most difficult and complex Yoruba notions: destiny, reincarnation, the soul, and the personality. These notions are closely interrelated and each depends for its meaning on the others and on the general framework provided by the orun/aiye distinction.

The cosmology, of course, only makes sense in relation to people for it is they who, in a sense, can be said to make the gods. As Barber writes:

> " Relations between humans and orisa are in some sense a projection of relations between people in society".[20]

A basic premise of Yoruba thought is that the human being is composed of corporeal and spiritual elements, the latter serving a variety of functions related to beliefs about destiny and reincarnation. The physical body (ara) is regarded as a receptacle and distinguished from the various spiritual elements which inhabit it and provide it with its life and individuality. The most important of these spiritual elements are the life-giving or vital force (emi) given, according to an Ifa verse, by Olorun, and the "seat of the intellect" or "head" (ori). The latter, according to legend, is provided by the careless and corrupt potter, the divinity, Ajala.

Those who pay Ajala are given a good "head" and the possibility of a good destiny in the form of success in the world, providing the dangers from negative forces such as witchcraft and sorcery can be kept at bay. Those who do not or cannot afford to pay have to take a chance and may well receive one of Ajala's numerous poorly fashioned "heads" and, therefore, the strong possibility of a bad destiny.[21] This complex and complicated subject of destiny will be taken up again shortly.

Meanwhile we can consider the important distinction between "vital force" (emi) and "seat of the intellect" and/ or "head" (ori). This is not always clear cut; at times it appears that both are understood to refer to the intellect. What, however, is clear is that the "vital force" is indispensable to the body providing it with movement and life itself. It is also considered to have an existence "outside" of the body which allows it to think independently of it and to travel unaccompanied in dreams.[22] It is more difficult to be precise about the nature and function of the ori. As already indicated, like the emi, it is sometimes regarded as the "seat of the intellect". The ori, as already mentioned, is also

related to the person's destiny in that it constitutes the element that predetermines a person's success or failure in the world. As one specialist describes it, the ori is the:

> "indwelling spirit of the head, presiding over success and failure in day to day affairs".[23]

While it follows that if individuals receive their "head" or the seat of their intellect (ori) prior to their birth then they are predestined, it will be necessary to qualify more precisely what the Yoruba mean by destiny. But first a look at how the whole process begins and unfolds. Although there is some variation in the accounts what is generally believed to take place at the very beginnings of a person's existence and go on to determine her/his life course is this: the vital force (emi) of each and every individual kneels before Olorun, the supreme being, and by speaking certain key words chooses that individual's future course in the world (aiye). It is then the task of that person's ori, "seat of the intellect", "indwelling spirit of the head", also referred to as the "ancestral guardian soul", to ensure that the course chosen is followed.[24]

This all seems very contrary to what observers see as the highly individualistic, achievement-oriented nature of Yoruba society. One would expect religious beliefs or the religious imagination to allow for this individuality rather than appear to block it by notions of destiny such as this. If such a notion fits anywhere then surely it fits the Tallensi situation as described by Meyer Fortes rather than the Yoruba case.[25]

However, a belief in destiny, as will be seen, does not necessarily conflict with individualism. Moreover, in matters of status and achievement, as in other areas of human concern, theory does not always match practice. What MacCaffey says of achievement in Kongo society provides a good example of the divide between theory and practice:

> "Kongo society is clearly not universalistic and the possibilities of achievement are highly ambiguous. The ideology of Kongo institutions allows little room for it; the emphasis is all on what is due to and from a man, rather than on what he can make of or for himself. <u>In practice, as distinct from local theory, to obtain one's due requires luck and effort and is in no small measure an achievement. Retrospectively achievement is explained as birthright ascription</u> (emphasis mine)".[26]

Moreover, a strong belief in destiny is often tempered to a greater or lesser degree by the principle of elective affinity which brings it into harmony with the psychological and socio-cultural realities of the local situation. Horton, for example, while accepting that the dominant characteristic of Tallensi society is ascribed status in contrast with the much more achievement-oriented Yoruba, has shown that what is in substance the same notion of destiny, is much less rigidly applied by the latter on account of the nature of their economic and socio-political organization in particular which allow for a greater degree of flexibility, individual initiative and competition.[27]

Douglas agrees with Horton and suggests, furthermore, that certain West African societies may well have a more highly differentiated notion of the self than that found in other societies among them Homeric Greek society where the self, she maintains, was much more of a passive instrument. By way of contrast there is the possibility in the West African context of the individual totally rejecting an earlier chosen destiny:

> "In these West African cultures (Tallensi, Ijo etc.) the binding words of destiny are spoken by the individual himself. Once he knows what he has done he can repudiate his earlier choice".[28]

However, in case the impression be given of a completely open society where notions of individualism, rivalry and competition reign unchecked we can now look in a little more detail at the significance of destiny in the lives of the Yoruba, and also at the limitations imposed by it and upon it.

Destiny and its limits

The use of the term "destiny" to describe how among the Yoruba and in the wider West African context an individual's future course in the world is decided is, as already suggested, misleading. First of all there is no Yoruba belief in invincible fate as is clear from the recognition of a degree of individual choice for, as was seen above, the vital force (emi) chooses the life course that the individual will follow. Moreover, the "seat of the intellect" or "head" (ori) which directs and guides the individual is not a fixed and

rigid principle but can be influenced in an effort to improve one's life course.

A further point needs to be made concerning the role of the personal divinity or orisa in the matter of individual destiny. This divinity eventually comes to supplant the "head" or ori as the chief protector of a person's destiny, more often than not when the individual reaches adulthood. The process is as follows: the person's "head" or ori decides which divinity will be associated with the individual throughout the latter's life span. However, once individuals learn, mostly through divination, who that divinity is they will make offerings to it, and over time will come to ignore the cult of their "head" or ori.[29] Moreover, individuals have a second "head", ori, or "ancestral guardian spirit" in heaven (orun) who, in return for sacrifice, helps them to live out their life span in the best possible way, and even improve their destiny.

While a majority of those interviewed about their destiny believed that it could be improved, all rejected the idea that it could be fundamentally changed or repudiated.[30] Destiny, although not regarded as fully determinative of their life course, is not an empty belief and it would, therefore, seem more correct to speak of its modification rather than, as Douglas does, of its repudiation.

Among the "loopholes" for "changing" what is seen as a very bad destiny or life course is the strong suspicion that individuals have that their destiny has not been correctly ascertained. Any sustained run of misfortune can be sufficient reason for entertaining such doubts. These "unlucky" individuals can then consult the diviner or babalawo to verify whether or not the divinity assigned to them at birth to protect them from malign forces was in fact the correct, true divinity for them. It is widely believed that mistakes in this matter could be the cause of present misfortune and clearly, if the required sacrifices to the protector deity are not performed, then one cannot expect the full support and protection of one's supernaturally assigned guardian.

If there has been a mistake in diagnosing the correct deity the individual concerned would

then be informed of the true divinity and counselled to worship that divinity in the hope of a better life. Such dependence on the protection and guidance of one's divinity, it should be noted, often does not loom large in a person's life until that person experiences a run of inexplicable misfortune or is unexpectedly called, perhaps in a dream, to perform an unusual task. It is mainly then that recourse is had in earnest to the religious system for an explanation and for counsel on such matters.

This is not, however, true for everyone. There are those who either never have believed or who no longer believe in the concept of individual destiny as such, preferring to see all that happens in terms of relationships. As one informant expressed it:

> "If you arrive in a place and do not know the people there the relationships you will make will determine how you are. A child coming into the world is in the same position. You can relate to a person in a positive or negative way. The moment you choose one or the other is the crucial moment for you."[31]

But the point to note here is that even for those who in pursuit of their destiny do have recourse to their personal divinity their relationship with their god is far from one sided with the orisa totally dominating the believer. It is one of interdependence; it is both divinity-dominated and devotee-dominated, and this in itself says much about the malleability of the concept of destiny among the Yoruba.

The divinity's dominance can be seen in the punishment meted out to devotees for failure to carry out their wishes. On the other hand, not only can devotees come to resemble their divinity over time in personality but can even go beyond this by putting their own stamp on the personality of their divinity in a number ways including that of the possession process. Devotees may even come to be spoken of as "owning" the divinity in question and it is worth mentioning here that it is interpretations of divine-human relations such as this that have convinced many that the gods are best understood if seen as divinized humans.[32]

Thus, destiny is a more open-ended concept than might at first appear to be the case and reflects a society in which individual initiative, effort and skill are essential to the

achievement of high status and are recognized as such, especially, but not exclusively where Yoruba·men are concerned. It reflects a society in which success depends on pursuing with effort and dedication one of the numerous paths to advancement rather than simply "fitting in", as it were, to a series of ascribed positions, as is the case among the Tallensi in northern Ghana. Furthermore, following Douglas, this notion of destiny mirrors a Yoruba society where "grid" (rules which relate one person to another on an ego-centred basis) is strong and "group" (the experience of a bounded social unit) is weak, in other words, it is a society in which the individual enjoys a considerable amount of personal freedom to reflect on that society and to question its values, assumptions and his/her own role in it.[33] Yoruba society is, then, a society of many and varied possibilities, one in which there are:

> "a bewildering array of alternative paths to high status, alternative ideals of life style and alternative models of personality."[34]

Thus, the notion of destiny, as understood by the Yoruba, allows for modification, change in the status and social position, profession and style of life of the individual. And also in self-understanding and self-presentation. As previously noted, this view of Yoruba society is not intended to suggest that the notion of destiny is irrelevant. What Parsons claimed to be the case generally - that what a person is can only be understood in terms of a set of beliefs which define what he/she ought to be - is relevant to the Yoruba case.[35] Indeed, it is precisely this Yoruba concern with what as individuals they should do to fulfil both their destiny and personality that has suggested to observers that their religion, and West African religion generally, is best understood and explained as a form of social psychology, and why it retained such a grip on its practitioners, even on those who converted to either Christianity or Islam.[36]

Yoruba religion as a social psychology

To the extent that it provides individuals with the models and the techniques - gods and

divination respectively - to discover an answer to vital questions concerning their capacities or potential, their relationship to society and their personal destiny, to that extent Yoruba religion, like all West African religions, operates as a social psychology.

This interpretation of West African religions as social psychologies has been advanced by Horton and rests on a distinction between the role played by ancestors and lesser divinities in the life both of society as a whole and in that of the individual. After death there is a transformation of the personality, individuals becoming ancestral spirits. As such they will take an active part in the affairs of their descent group giving advice through dreams and trance, and punishing those who contravene traditional norms.

Horton's hypothesis regarding West African religions as social psychologies depicts the ancestors as "forces of society" - internally represented in Freudian terms by the super-ego or censor - as the spirits who uphold its norms and values and punish those who violate these norms and values. The divinities on the other hand, a majority of whom are, as already indicated, associated with features of the local environment, have little to do with the maintenance of these group norms or the unity and cohesion of the community. We say a majority for some are both nature spirits and deified heroes, a well known example being the deity Shango who, legend has it, is both god of thunder and divinized royal hero of the city of Old Oyo, capital of the Oyo empire. As "nature spirits" the gods are, to cite Horton, "forces of nature" - in Freudian terms the internal representative of this would be the id - who:

> "brings prosperity to the community in return for proper attentions".[37]

Following this line of interpretation of the role of ancestors and divinities, Yoruba religion can be explained as a social psychology, along Freudian lines, in that it provides both a theory and an explanation of individual fortunes in society and the techniques for preserving or protecting good fortunes and modifying poor ones. A key figure in all of this is naturally the diviner or babalawo (father of secrets). The training for this office is long

and the diviner is often regarded as the philosopher and guide of the local community, his advice being sought on many matters and likewise his remedies for both spiritual and physical illnesses.

Looked at, then, as a system offering numerous paths to self-realization, that offers explanations about one's relationship to society, that predicts the future course of events, it becomes clearer why Traditional religion was so central to the life of the Ijebu and other Yoruba and why, even on becoming Muslim or Christian, individuals, caught up in a process of rapid social and economic change, retained such strong attachment to the traditional belief system and inparticular its divinatory techniques.

In other ways too the traditional order provided supports, for example, supports of an organizational and institutional kind, that could prove to be extremely valuable even to would-be Muslim and Christian prophets, including Muhammad Jumat Imam. Here we will consider some of the important traditional institutions that are of direct relevance to our study of Mahdism in Ijebu-Ode beginning with sacred kingship.

Sacred kingship

A widespread feature of the pre-colonial Yoruba politico-religious organization was the institution of sacred kingship. The ruler, oba, was regarded as the companion (ekeji) of the gods (orisa). As Lloyd and Parrinder, among others, have shown, the accession of a new king was marked by elaborate rites that sometimes included the retracing of the route by which the founder of the ruling dynasty was said to have come to the kingdom.[38] Then followed a period of seclusion in which the ruler was instructed in his role before being endowed with the mystical powers of office in a rite which involved the symbolic eating of the heart of his predecessor.[39]

The king, moreover, as Parrinder has pointed out, was hedged about with taboos. However, while his every utterance was charged with power, this did not make for a dictatorial, autocratic system: there were checks and balances and ways of removing an ineffective or

unacceptable ruler from office, the only reason for whose existence was the well-being of his subjects.[40] It was over against this background, as the following chapter will show in considerable detail, that the British colonial administration's decision to grant more power to the king and thereby weaken that of the subordinate chiefs was taken and eventually gave rise to that crisis of royal authority and legitimacy in Ijebuland, discussed in chapter three, which opened up the way for mahdis and messiahs to proclaim the end of the old order and the beginning of the new.

Women priests and chiefs

Another feature of the Ijebu and more generally the Yoruba religious system that is of direct relevance to this study is the tradition of women priests and chiefs. Priestesses, of course, were not confined to the Yoruba. Indeed among the Ibibio and Igbo people further to the East the phenomenon of female priestesses was perhaps even more widespread. Moreover, religion was not the only sphere in which women could rise to the highest position. Women chiefs of very high standing and with very great authority existed throughout Yorubaland.

In the royal palace of the Alafin of Oyo a priestess with the honorific title of Iya Nasso was responsible for the cult of the previously mentioned divinity or orisa, Shango. The Iya Oba, the official Queen Mother, the king's natural mother being expected to commit suicide on his accession, was another powerful force in the royal palace. But even more powerful than the Iya Oba was the Iya kere or "little mother" who had responsibility for the royal regalia and who also exercised considerable authority not only over the royal slaves but also over several of the major provincial towns of the Oyo empire.[41]

In Ijebuland itself women held prominent positions in the religious and other spheres. There is a female cult centred on Obinren Ojowu, the deified spirit of a woman who had accompanied Obanta on his journey from Ife to Ijebu-Ode to found the city. Regarded as the founder's guiding spirit the cult of Obinren Ijowu is of the utmost importance

throughout Ijebuland.[42]

Prominent among the powerful and influential in Lagos was the Iyalode the highest ranking female chief and second in status only to the king or oba. She held the highly prized and powerful position of leader of the market women.[43] And elsewhere in Nigeria, for example among the Igbo in the eastern region, women also enjoyed considerable status and influence as a result of their economic endeavours and consequent financial independence.[44] This active involvement of women in trade and commerce was not simply a phenomenon associated with the traditional economy. By the 1930s relatively large numbers of women in south-western Nigeria who had already received a western education - there were an estimated 53,000 girls at school in southern Nigeria in 1938 compared with 4,000 in the northern region[45] - had begun to make headway in the modern economy, in particular in the distributive sector. Indeed they played an indispensable role in the success of the United Africa Company (UAC) among others. More had entered the teaching, nursing, legal and medical professions.

However, in the religious sphere, as in others, there was discrimination on grounds of gender. There were, for example, cults which were almost exclusively for men, among them the Agemo, Oro and Egungun cults. Nevertheless, while women were generally forbidden to perform certain religious functions, including the sacrificing of dogs and other animals, they did participate actively with men in the worship of the community gods and in the rites of passage.

These brief observations on priestesses, women chiefs and women entrepreneurs help to explain why Muhammad Jumat Imam's decision to appoint a woman, one of his wives, as his deputy and successor, provoked little consternation and aroused little opposition, at least during his lifetime. After his death, it will be shown, the appointment of his wife as his successor was to divide the Mahdiyya movement, although not simply because she was a woman; perhaps even more important, as chapter seven explains, was the question of

inheritance.

Age-grades

An institution of considerable importance to the smooth running of traditional society and to any would be leader of a new movement of a religious or any other kind was the age-set or grade composed of all those born within a certain period of years.[46] This institution cut across ties of residence and descent in Ijebu and other Yoruba towns and possessed its own organizational structure. Members were closely bound together by bonds of affection and loyalty and held regular meetings under the presidency of the senior member of the group.

The institution was in many respects a mutual aid society, members contributing to each other's naming, marriage and funeral rites and helping with such problems as debts incurred in business and so forth. It was also a forum for resolving disputes and planning tactics and strategy relating to political and other objectives. Its importance for the Mahdiyya movement, the millenarian movement under discussion, is that it supplied Muhammad Jumat Imam, at the time the senior member of his age group, with a nucleus of supporters and assistants right from the outset. This millenarian movement also owed much not only in the realm of ideas and practices but also in terms of its structure to associations such as Ansar-Ud-Deen society, the Ahmadiyya movement and the Tijaniyya movement on the Islamic side, and the aladura or praying churches especially, on the Christian side.

We can turn at this juncture to a consideration of the Yoruba versions of Islam and Christianity which most influenced Muhammad Jumat Imam's thought and behaviour, approaching the question from the angle of conversion to these religions, and in particular to Islam.

Ijebu conversion to Islam and Christianity.

The number of Ijebu and in general Yoruba who became Muslims and Christians in the

period c.1890-1942 - the period that coincides roughly with Muhammad Jumat Imam's life from his very early childhood to his declaration of prophethood-was remarkable.

Writing in the early 1920s the then British Resident of Ijebu-Ode, Amoury Talbot, stated with reference to the South of Nigeria:

> " By far the greater part of the population of the Southern Provinces is heathen and devoted to animism and ancestor worship. . .it is unfortunately impossible, save from the collation of the various mission reports, to estimate the progress of Christianity and Mohammedanism, but there is no doubt that vast strides have been made by these two religions in the last few years. The number of Mohammedans, viz. 5% of the total population, and more than half of that of the Christians, is somewhat striking."[47]

By the 1940s it is estimated that some forty five percent of the inhabitants of Ijebu-Ode were Muslim and some forty five percent Christian.[48] And this despite the fact that both of these religions were effectively barred from entering the province until well into the second half of the nineteenth century and, even when access was eventually allowed, had initially to move with great caution on account of the strong opposition from the Ijebu ruling and commercial elites.

Although what is of greater relevance here is the form and content of Ijebu Islam, and Christianity, it is nevertheless worth referring briefly to the explanations offered for this rapid conversion, or perhaps better "adhesion" in the sense Nock used the term, of the Yoruba to these world religions.[49] One such explanation, suggested by Robin Horton, has already been hinted at above. Horton contends that conversion to Islam and Christianity in the West African and wider sub-Saharan African setting should not be seen as a radical change on the part of the converts from one system of belief and practice to another.[50] For example, he explains with reference to his two tier cosmology of traditional religion already outlined, that the notion of the supreme being was part of the traditional stock of religious ideas and not a Muslim or Christian import.

Horton then argues that from the second half of the nineteenth century this belief in the supreme being became much more relevant as traditional societies in Africa were

increasingly opening up to the wider world of trade and commerce or, as he puts it, as the boundaries of the "microcosm" were being prised open. One consequence of this, as already noted, was a diminution in the social responsibility and relevance of the lesser gods.[51] The moment of the supreme being had arrived with the demise of small scale, largely self sufficient, isolated communities, for, as stated previously, in the traditional cosmology it was the task of the supreme being to underpin the macrocosm.

All that Islam and Christianity contributed, therefore, to the rise of monotheism in those parts of black Africa such as Yorubaland, which by the second half of the nineteenth century were still largely untouched by their influence, was to act as catalysts, hastening a process toward monotheism that was already underway as a result of other social and economic forces that were breaking down traditional boundaries and widening frontiers. This theory arose in part from Horton's critique of what he regarded as Peel's Weberian type neo-intellectualist explanation of religious change in Yorubaland.[52] Peel explained conversion to the aladura (praying) churches that emerged in Yorubaland toward the end of the First World War as an attempt to grapple intellectually with changes, some of them prolonged, dating back to the fall of the Oyo empire in the first half of the nineteenth century and the civil wars which followed and which persisted until well into the second half of that same century. Formal colonization accelerated the changes already underway. During this time of profound change Yoruba religion - which Peel like Horton believes is essentially about explanation, prediction and control of space-time events - and social organization had moved apart, and it was this separation of superstructure from infrastructure that in large measure facilitated religious innovation. The changes that followed came in various forms, one being the aladura movement, much of whose appeal was attributable to the fact that it offered people new ideas and practices which enabled them to grapple with colonization and the cultural, economic, and political innovations that it brought in its train, and with the not infrequent periods of depression, disease, war, and

famine that beset Yorubaland in the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century. Thus, aladura Christianity being the "rational" religion it was, attracted the more "rational" types such as the clerks and their kind whom it provided with a large measure of continuity - its emphasis being still very much on religion as explanation, prediction and control of space-time events - and the intellectual and organizational framework which facilitated the re-ordering of their beliefs in a new and coherent way, bringing them into line with what they were now experiencing.[53]

The data do not always fit well with Peel's theory, many of the aladura converts being farmers, people from a wide range of occupations, and perhaps a majority being women in pursuit of a cure for infertility, an "infirmity" that gave rise to considerable familial and social problems.[54]

Although Horton has been critical of Peel's theory arguing that its "refurbished, neo-intellectualist" approach is inadequate to the case at hand his own explanation, based on the two tier cosmological model considered above, has also come in for criticism. Fisher, for example, maintains that it is somewhat fanciful having little support from history or anywhere else for, he argues, following Horton, where one would expect to find an African community worshipping the supreme being to the neglect of the lesser gods the converse is very often the case. Moreover, in the rapidly changing context of colonialism when the boundaries of traditional societies were being rapidly dismantled the result was very often not a shift in emphasis in the worship of the communities affected to the worship of the supreme being at the expense of the lesser gods, but once again the converse.[55]

Furthermore, what is very striking when one considers the spread of Islam and Christianity in Yorubaland and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa is not so much the move toward a pure monotheistic position but the tenacity with which converts have held to many of their traditional beliefs and practices.[56]

Returning to the question of the parting of the ways between traditional religion and social

organization which allowed for large scale religious innovation, this process, as Peel and Horton rightly point out, was hastened along in the nineteenth century with the collapse of the Oyo empire and the wars that followed for supremacy over Yorubaland. However, these two scholars possibly exaggerate the degree of differentiation in that period, especially in the case of Ijebuland which, as previously noted, remained a strong and closely knit society until the early 1890s with religion as its social cement. Moreover, even in those Yoruba lands and city states only recently formed and almost constantly at war there was this strong bond between the traditional religion and social structure. Otherwise it would be extremely difficult to explain the robust opposition to the public display of Christianity and Islam not only in Ijebuland but also in other parts of Yorubaland such as Ibadan well into the second half of that same century. As one Muslim in Ibadan expressed it in 1855:

> " Muslims must conform a little to heathen fashion because they are not yet enough in power and number to get on without".[57]

In Ijebuland Islam was officially prohibited until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Moreover, when it did enter the kingdom, brought there by Hausa domestic slaves in the employment of Ijebu merchants, it was widely regarded for some time as the religion of the downcast and the foreigner. That this attitude extended beyond Ijebu is shown by Parrinder's study of Ibadan where Islam, introduced to that city in the 1820s or 1830s, was also regarded as a "foreigner's" religion some considerable time after its arrival in the city. He writes:

> " That it long remained an alien faith, with few Yoruba among its leaders, may be deduced from the fact that the first six imams were all of foreign origin, from places such as Kano and Borno. Only with the seventh imam do we come to one who is not a stranger to the town, in virtue of his father having been imam before him in Ibadan. Even so none of the imams have been of Yoruba stock..."[58]

Moreover, the Muslim community in Ijebuland was obliged to worship in secret until such time as it began to attract some of the influential and powerful, one of the better known

being the former Christian Chief Kuku who on becoming a Muslim brought along with him to Islam an estimated two hundred members of his household.[59] From this time onwards the pace of conversion to Islam gathered momentum, especially after 1918 and the outbreak of the influenza epidemic, with the result that by 1952 some fifty thousand Ijebu had become Muslims.[60]

The tradition of subjects following the path taken by their chief clearly assisted this expansion of Islam, as did the fact that Islam in Ijebuland as in the rest of Yorubaland endorsed local customs, with some modifications, such as polygamy and divination and adopted many of the organizational and administrative structures of the local society. Moreover, from whatever perspective it is considered - religious, medical, social, cultural or economic - Islam and the traditional society shared much in common. What Gbadamosi said of Islam in Yorubaland as a whole in the late nineteenth century applied equally to Ijebu-Ode:

> "Very soon almost the whole complex of the system of Yoruba traditional organization was, in the main, taken over by the Yoruba Muslims. . .(and) with the coming of the new culture, Islam, about which knowledge was just growing, there was a remarkable tendency to borrow from and strike parallels with their own cultures and traditions."[61]

Moreover, the Muslim teacher, alufa, was perceived as the counterpart of the babalawo or diviner and often conducted himself in like manner while the leaders and officials of the Muslim community used indigenous titles. The imam was known as the parakoyi, a Yoruba title conferred on the person responsible for the organization of long-distance trade. The officer corps that developed in the mosques were also given traditional Yoruba titles such as balogun (commander of the old warriors), seriki (commander of young warriors) and sarumi (commander of the cavalry).

Muslims went further than striking parallels with traditional religion; they at times found themselves at the very heart of the practice of that religion. Abdul, for example, reports that many of the traditional priests known as alagemo priests were Muslim and that belief

in reincarnation and the use of Yoruba proper names indicating acceptance of this belief were very common among Muslims.[62]

Regarding their attitude toward the traditional ruler, Muslims tended on the whole to show greater loyalty and respect than Christians. In fact the former were renowned for their loyalty and support of the awujale or king and showed their acceptance of traditional authority by presenting their chief imam designate to the awujale for his "approval", regardless of whether he was a Muslim or not. The latter then attended the induction prayers that followed.

It might reasonably be asked why, if Islam covered so much of the same ground in terms of ritual and belief as Traditional religion and was so prepared to adapt, borrow and strike parallels with traditional culture, anyone thought it necessary to become a Muslim? Notwithstanding its tendency to become intimately bound up with the local culture, Islam was in principle unambiguously monotheistic and international in character and therefore a religion more in keeping with the enlargement in scale that was taking place at every level. Moreover, although a religion of progress and change in its own right it did not appear to threaten the past to the same extent as Christianity in a society in which the traditional world was still very much present, albeit amid the clear signs of a new order, political, social , cultural and economic.

Becoming a Muslim in this context not only opened up the possibility of access to an additional source of supernatural remedies but also to that important commodity literacy, still a passport to status and success, particularly in those areas where modernization had not as yet made its mark on customs and habits and the general way of life of the people. Membership of the Muslim community could also mean becoming part of a more cosmopolitan society, joining a wider network which offered greater possibilities for trade and commerce on an "international" scale.

With the opening up on a much larger scale of Ijebu society to the wider world during the

twentieth century, an opening up facilitated by improvements in road links and the introduction of the train and the motor car, the Muslim community had not only grown numerically but had also become much more diverse and self confident and a centre of influence and power to be reckoned with in its own right. And it can be noted here that by the 1930s when Muhammad Jumat Imam sought the post of chief Imam of this community Islam was on the point of becoming a political force in the land. Such an office was by this time much sought after for it not only carried with it considerable status and prestige but also provided the occupant with control over relatively large sources of revenue and patronage.

Becoming a Muslim, therefore, had its own very definite attractions, and these were increased with the arrival of "modernising" Muslim associations - among them the Ansar-Ud-Deen, (Helpers of Religion), Nuwair-Ud-Deen (the Light of Religion) societies and the Ahmadiyya movement - offering a thorough education in the western and Islamic sciences. More will be said of these movements in later chapters, simply mentioning here that the Ahmadiyya movement which originated in India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century believes its prophet Ghulam Ahmad to be the Mahdi of the Muslims and the Messiah of the Christians, the very title that Muhammad Jumat Imam chose as his own when he proclaimed himself a prophet in 1942.[63]

To return briefly to the question of the Muslim proclivity for striking parallels. Not only were parallels struck with local culture and tradition but also with Portuguese/Brazilian Catholic tradition. Some of the former slaves (amaros) who began to return in relatively large numbers to West Africa from Brazil in the 1830s and 1840s were Muslims and once back home in Lagos and other cities in the south-west of Nigeria and the republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey) they proceeded to construct their mosques in the style of Brazilian churches.[64] These Muslims were also on extremely good terms with the Catholics they had known in Brazil some of whom had also returned home to West Africa and neither group

had any difficulty accepting invitations to attend the rites of passage and other religious occasions in mosque or church.

But tension existed between Muslims and Christians over, for example, education, the former being particularly critical of what they saw as Christianity's use of the Christian mission school to turn their children into Christians. Not only did many young Muslims convert to Christianity as a result but even those who did not were to acquire a very thorough knowledge of the Old and New Testament and of Christian doctrine and morals, while instruction in the Qur'an remained very basic, confined as it was to an hour in the evening after school and provided for the most part by Muslim teachers who were barely literate.[65] The low standard of teaching and the poor quality of the education in the Muslim school were in their own way as alienating as the Christian education given to Muslim students attending a mission-run school. It was less distressing socially to have a sound Christian education than a poor Muslim alternative. As the Muslim scholar Galadanci noted:

> " The Muslim religion became an embarrassment for the young Muslim because it was said to produce half educated, second class citizens."[66]

We will return to this important question of the education of Muslims in later chapters and in particular in chapters four and five. Meanwhile, it needs to be pointed out that although the main body of Muslims remained "accommodationists" and were prepared to strike parallels with local culture, there was also the "modernist" wing, and a small but not insignificant conservative reform movement in Ijebu and Yoruba Islam by the 1920s, led in the main by Muslim mystics of the Tijaniyya brotherhood.[67]

The Tijaniyya Sufi order, like the Ahmadiyya movement, had, as noted in chapter one, a strong millenarian dimension and also, like the Ahmadiyya movement, it was to exercise a strong influence over the thinking of Muhammad Jumat Imam. The order probably arrived in Ijebu-Ode, carried there by Hausa Muslim traders, in the early years of the twentieth century.[68] According to family sources, the father of Muhammad Jumat Imam,

Hassan Amoke-Oja, was not only a member of this brotherhood but also its representative in Ijebuland.[69] As to its influence on Muhammad Jumat Imam, this can seen in his writings and teachings which contain a number of Tijani ideas, while the organizational structure of the Mahdiyya, the mahdist movement which he founded, shared a good deal in common with Tijaniyya organizational arrangements, something that will be discussed in later chapters.

To close this section we can note one further point of a more general kind regarding the development of Islam in Ijebuland and Yorubaland as a whole: how it followed the pattern of Islam's progress over the centuries in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, that is outside those regions conquered by jihad and mentioned in chapter one.[70] In those non-jihadic areas, as in Yorubaland, the religion was almost always transmitted in relay by neighbouring peoples coming into contact with each other. Moreover, its appeal lay in its adaptability, simplicity, the fact that Africans in the main were its carriers, and its tradition of learning, a tradition which accounts in some measure, as Goody explains, for its tendency towards militancy elsewhere in West Africa.[71]

Although, as Gbadamosi shows, militancy was not entirely absent from Yoruba Islam,[72] for the most part in Yorubaland, as in most Mande areas and in the Volta Basin, its advance there was peaceful and this combined with the possibility it offered of membership of a wider trading and commercial network - which according to observers made it well suited to the Ijebu temperament and interests - ensured its growth in Ijebuland and elsewhere, in south-western Nigeria.[73]

We can now turn to discuss at some length that other important influence on the thinking of the founder of the Mahdiyya movement, Muhammad Jumat Imam, Christianity, in its mission, independent and aladura church forms.[74] It was the beliefs and rituals of the aladura churches rather than those of the mission-based Christian churches that exercised the strongest influence on the Mahdist in Ijebuland. Indeed, the Muhammad Jumat Imam's

closeness to and understanding of the aladura churches was such that not only will this need to be referred to time and again in the course of this study but would also seem to suggest that his Mahdiyya movement functioned in some respects as the Muslim counterpart to the Aladura movement.

Mission Christianity

While Islam's compromising, accommodationist spirit, its tendency to "borrow and strike parallels", made it possible for the local ruler and his community to co-opt it, as it were, into the local religious and cultural system, this was not possible to anything like the same extent with mission Christianity. Nevertheless, Muhammad Jumat Imam, founder of the Mahdiyya, was not entirely uninfluenced by mission church Christianity which began in Ijebuland in the late nineteenth century and was and remained mainly Protestant and more precisely Anglican and Methodist, although the Baptist mission was to make considerable progress in the smaller towns and in the rural areas from the end of World War II.[75]

The Christian missions, however, did attempt to adapt in certain areas, for example by employing indigenous concepts for God to illustrate the similarities between itself and the Traditional faith. But overall mission Christianity tended to lay far greater emphasis on its otherness. It had come to root up and pull down, to make all things new, to radically change society. As Ajayi has shown the Christian mission church presented itself as different from all about it not only in the way in which it separated itself from all around it in terms of its physical location but in virtually every other respect.[76] Moreover, although not always as eager as some observers make out to use education to advance its cause - at first the Anglican church, and it was not alone in this, was quite reluctant to employ the school as a means of evangelization in many areas of West Africa[77] - the Christian mission churches had in their gift the key instrument of progress in the emerging new order, education.

Mission Christianity, furthermore, saw itself as extending the frontiers of civilization against

the dead weight of both Traditional religion and Islam which, it believed, kept the people in darkness. God had once, by its means, brought progress to Europe and now He would do the same again for Africa.[78] Missionaries held what might be termed a positivist, evolutionist view of religious development akin to the Comtean law of the three stages of human intellectual development. Kumm who worked in Northern Nigeria in the early years of this century with the Sudan United Mission (SUM) expressed this view when he placed Traditional religion at the base or foot of the ladder of civilized, rational thought and behaviour, and Islam half way up the ladder, with Christianity at the top.[79] Although "higher" than Traditional religion in the estimation of the missionary Islam was eventually to be on the receiving end of the most persistent and immoderate missionary invective. Kumm, just mentioned, depicted it as "excelling in works of evil" and Miller of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) believed there was a direct link between Islamic beliefs and practices and poverty, destitution and immorality.[80]

These men were not blind to the failings of Christianity and its participation in such evils as the trans-Atlantic slave trade. However, such failings as these were not attributable to Christianity per se, but were explained away as by-products resulting from wrong practice. By way of contrast the evils of Islam were a direct consequence of an evil belief system and ethic.[81]

This hostility to Islam was the result not only of fundamental doctrinal differences such as the Muslim rejection of Jesus as divine but also to the lack of success Christians had in converting Muslims. Misled by their belief that Muslims were only very loosely attached to their beliefs - they mistakenly equated outward manifestations of syncretism with lack of serious commitment to Islam - missionaries were convinced that they would soon come to realise that Christianity was a more authentic and enlightened faith, and, consequently, convert en masse. This rarely if ever happened, Muslims showing a very firm attachment to certain fundamentals of their faith and in particular the belief in the oneness of God

which the Christian doctrine of the Trinity appeared to compromise, and the finality of the prophethood of prophet Muhammad.

Moreover, mission-based Christianity's insistence on monogamy, its European leadership, its use of Christian as opposed to indigenous names and of western dress, its appeal to youth and its selection of leaders on the basis of educational and moral criteria in conflict with tradition, were among the practices that made of it a Church apart. It was, of course, precisely for the very reason that it appeared to offer a complete alternative to the traditional ways that it appealed to some. For others for whom Tradition was power, status, wealth, respect for the principle of seniority, and security, Christianity posed a threat, and a seemingly even greater one, as already indicated, than Islam, to the traditional order.

But mission Christianity and Tradition were not to remain polar opposites. The mission churches made attempts to indigenize their ministry and liturgy although change in this direction was slow and often the result of pressure from the people who were moving away in considerable numbers to the independent and aladura churches whose influence on the Mahdiyya movement, as already noted and as will be shown below and in chapters four and five, was considerable and in some respects even decisive for Muhammad Jumat Imam's mission.

Independent and aladura churches

From the outset Ijebu-Ode was an important centre for both independency and the aladura movement. The Independent churches began to emerge in Nigeria in the late nineteenth century.[82] In 1888 a split occurred in the American Baptist Missionary Society in Lagos as leading members of the congregation, some of whom had returned to Nigeria from Sierra Leone, began the attempt to adapt Christianity to the local culture and thus rid it of what was seen as its elitist, foreign image. Prominent among the leaders of this movement was David Vincent, a Baptist pastor, who changed the baptismal name given to

him by his former masters in the Caribbean to the Yoruba name Mojola Agbebi. In Agbebi's opinion:

> "Hymn books, harmonium, dedications, pew constructions, surpliced choir, the white man's names, the white man's dress, are so many non-essentials, so many props and crutches affecting the religious manhood of the Christian Africans".[83]

Agbebi was insistent that Christianity in Africa should make itself indigenous and relevant, using wherever possible, "African style and fashion in worship."[84] The independent churches such as the United African Church while changing very little of the doctrinal content of the Christianity which they had inherited from the mission churches, held their services in Yoruba, introduced African music and chant into the liturgy and allowed polygamy.

Secessions such as the above mentioned Baptist secession in Lagos were also about questions of power and authority within the church and whether these should remain within the hands of Europeans or be handed over to Africans. From the beginning the policy of the C.M.S had been the establishment of self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating African churches but the Crowther crisis, in which Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the bishop of the Niger Delta Pastorate was held responsible for the alleged moral misdemeanours of some of his pastors and obliged to resign, was taken by many African Christians to indicate the abandonment of this approach.[85] Consequently, opposition to European control stiffened. The United Native Baptist Church of Lagos was no longer prepared to accept "foreign" leadership, its constitution stating:

> "It has been resolved that a purely Native African Church be founded for the evangelization and ameliorization of our race, to be governed by Africans".[86]

Other churches went much further and spoke of the acceptance of leadership by non-Africans as tantamount to "race suicide".[87] The Nigerian "African Unitarian Church", also known as the "Isholarian Congregation for Universal Brotherhood" or "National Church of Africa" affirmed, with the Christian missionary movement, and Islam, clearly in mind:

> " It is not in harmony with the will of God that any nation or race should be subject to the religious dictates of any foreign nation or race, and that it is the

> unchanging and everlasting purpose of God that every nation or race must have its own messiahs in regular succession for its own people in particular and for all mankind in general."[88]

Echoes of this spirit are to be found in some of the aladura churches, in particular from the lips of the prophet Oshitelu, the Ijebu founder of the Church of the Lord, Aladura.[89] And also, as chapters five and six of this study show, for the first time in Ijebu, and indeed Yoruba, Islam from the person of Muhammad Jumat Imam, the Mahdi-Messiah. The aladura, praying, churches exercised possibly an even greater influence over Muhammad Jumat Imam than the independent churches. As already noted, these praying churches began to emerge after the First World War as a result of spiritual and/or faith healing initiatives set in motion by the Ijebu Pastor Shadare, known locally as Daddy Ali, and the primary school teacher Sophia Odunlami, to counter the influenza epidemic. Both were members of St. Saviour's Anglican church situated within five minutes walking distance of Muhammad Jumat Imam's home and mosque in Idepo Street, Ijebu-Ode. Moreover, Pastor Shadare was related by marriage to the self proclaimed Mahdi-Messiah.

Shadare and Odunlami founded the Precious Stone or Diamond Society which insisted that members reject western medicine and rely exclusively for healing on prayer and faith in Christ alone. Later the society was to accept the seven principles on healing through prayer formulated by the Philadelphia based fundamentalist sect, the Faith Tabernacle Society.[90] Out of these beginnings came the aladura, prayer, movement. Of the numerous aspects of the aladura movement that are directly relevant to our understanding of the Mahdiyya movement, two of the most important were the emphasis it laid on prophecy and dreams and / or visions as sources of revelation and on prayer and faith as means of healing. The movement began with a dream in which Pastor Shadare saw the Anglican church he frequented, St.Saviour's, divided into a larger, dark section and a smaller section ablaze with light. The darkness was attributed to the neglect of prayer by the majority of Christians. Complementing this dream was the vision which Sophia Adefobe Odunlami

received on recovering from an attack of influenza in 1918 in which she was told to visit Pastor Shadare and along with him form a prayer association to combat the influenza epidemic which was then decimating whole villages in Ijebuland and throughout the south-western region of Nigeria as well as other parts of the country and the world.[91]

It was these emphases, particularly that on dreams and visions, that the Anglican church opposed. Shadare was obliged to leave the church, as was the already mentioned prophet Oshitelu, founder of the Church of the Lord, Aladura, who, until his dismissal over the issue of visions, was a catechist in the Anglican church. Oshitelu then became involved in the Faith Tabernacle movement and then in 1930, twelve years before Muhammad Jumat Imam's Mahdiyya was founded, he established his own church, the Church of the Lord, aladura.[92]

In addition to the question of dreams and visions and the emphasis on faith healing there were a number of liturgical and moral issues, separating Anglicanism from the Aladura movement. In general aladura worship tends to be less formal and more enthusiastic and emotional. There is the use of drums, and clapping and stamping on the ground and shouts of hosȿaňah and hallelujah, all of which are believed to be means of obtaining spiritual blessings and benefits, with stamping on the ground, to take that as one example, obtaining for the participant spiritual power, well being, prosperity and peace.

Polygamy was also an important difference between the two. One informant, an aladura Archbishop of the Cherubim and Seraphim society, explained the differences between this aladura Church and his former Church, the Anglican Church, in this way:

> "In the Aladura Church we fast. We depend solely on prayer. We have visions. This was not so in the Anglican Church but there is only one God and, therefore, no real differences between us. Of course, when I took a second wife I was no longer a full member of the Anglican Church but just a friend of the Church."[93]

It was, then, polygamy, and the vision/dream, prophetic and faith healing elements and the informality and enthusiasm of the liturgy in the aladura approach, that created the tension

with the Anglican church and, as we shall see, made for considerable agreement between the aladura movement and the Mahdiyya.

However, to fully understand the aladura stress on faith healing it also has to be borne in mind that traditional medicine and traditional faith in the protection of the gods had both clearly failed the people, while western medicine was available to only a very small percentage of the population. In Ibadan at this time with a population of some 200,000 there was only one hospital with 319 beds and only two nursing staff. Thus, western medicine could not have been held up as offering the answer to people's health problems; it was simply unavailable to most.[94]

One informant, a former domestic slave, a convert to the Baptist church and a witness to the death and devastation wrought by the influenza epidemic of 1918 explained the turning away from traditional sources of protection both medical and religious in this way:

> "1918 was a very horrible time caused according to many of us by the death of many soldiers on the battlefield during World War I. However, when we went to consult Ifa we were told that the angels were waging war in heaven and when this happens there will be war and disease on earth. We were told to make sacrifices and we made them. But even those who prepared and offered sacrifices died in the epidemic. Even some of the Egungun masqueraders who had to carry the sacrifices to the city gates died. It was a horrible year. 1918 was the first year I touched a dead person. I was sick, my father was sick, his wife was sick, about ten of us were sick in the same long room. We resorted to only sucking oranges and then we did not die again (sic). We did not even take medicine for if you wanted to you would have to go to the farm and collect leaves and roots and would meet people dead on the road. People believed that the power of medicine was entirely unhelpful while there was a war in heaven between the orisa causing them this suffering. We concentrated instead on God, the Oba, Chief, the supreme being. When Egungun died carrying sacrifice everyone knew that there is no one that cannot die but the Almighty. So we prayed 'Olodumare keep us safe'. . .We concluded that God was the only invincible one, that no medicine could help us. People were dying, animals were dying and so we concentrated solely on Him".[95]

This long interview extract throws light on one of the principal reasons for the emergence of the aladura churches. It also makes it clear that the failure of the traditional gods to control the influenza epidemic was clearly one important reason why many Yoruba turned away from these lesser divinities and the traditional remedies associated with them to

concentrate on prayer to and worship of the supreme being as the most reliable and sure means of protection from evil in all its forms.

And as will be shown, Muhammad Jumat Imam was to place a similar emphasis on the power and indispensability of prayer and faith and divine revelation through dreams and visions. But neither he nor the aladura prophets whom he resembled rejected Traditional religion out of hand.

Aladuras and Traditionalists and Muslims

It would be incorrect to portray the aladura churches, any more than Islam, as having made a complete break with all traditional practices of a religious or medical kind. For example, in both the aladura and traditional religious world there is a strong belief in the inherent power of the word to heal and in the healing properties that are infused into water by incantation, thus making it a "revealed" alternative to medicine. Ifa, the god of divination, for instance, might direct a mother to bring water from a stream and pray over it:

> " May this water be charged with medicinal power, charged for stomach ache and for dysentery and for all kinds of worms. I come to do what I have been directed to do. May this water become medicine".[96]

Moreover, aladura prophets like traditional diviners and priests were noted for their ability to deal with spirits (abiku). As we shall see, Muhammad Jumat Imam was likewise esteemed for his competence in this area. Other parallels include the use of "charms" - the aladura prophet showing a preference for these in the form of written verses of the Bible - the emphasis on combatting witchcraft, the extensive use of "holy" water, the exclusion of menstruating women from the place of prayer, pilgrimages to sacred locations, in particular hill tops, and prophesying.

Traditionalists also laid great store by dreams of various kinds. In the world of Traditional religion the dream was a means of communication with the spirit world, a means used by the gods to warn lax devotees that harm would befall them if they did not perform their ritual obligations, a means of punishment, of conversion and of prophesying.[97] All of this

would have been very familiar to aladura church members for whom one of the most frequently quoted scripture passages was Joel 2.vv 28-29:

> "I will pour out my Spirit on all mankind. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions."

This emphasis on "the Spirit", on prophecy and on dreams and visions was the most appealing aspect of Christianity to many Yoruba and of course opened up immense possibilities for themselves as teachers and guides, as active participants rather than passive receivers of the faith. It also gave people a tremendous sense of the vitality, immediacy, dynamism and contemporary relevance of Christianity. Commenting on the healing ministry of the aladura prophet, Joseph Babalola, the Yoruba News stated that:

> " His life proves that the Gospel has lost none of its power especially the gifts of the Spirit as recorded in I Cor.12."[98]

There were also significant differences between the Aladura and the Traditionalists and perhaps this is nowhere more clearly manifest than in their understanding of the cause of sickness. While for the Aladura the cause of sickness is moral and more often than not the result of sin, for the Traditionalist illness is mainly caused by diseases which are substances of the body, and thus it is a natural phenomenon calling for the application of the proper techniques.[99]

Moreover, in their pronouncements the Aladura were strongly condemnatory of the Traditional religion, much more so than of Islam. While a number of hostile, inflammatory speeches and predictions were made by aladura prophets, including the above mentioned prophet Oshitelu, regarding Islam, the attitude of the aladura movement as a whole to the Muslim faith was relatively tolerant.[100]

What, however, is most striking is the degree to which the Ijebu shared common beliefs, reflecting once again that reality which Parrinder referred to as "mixed" religion, a reality further evidenced by the millenarian emphasis common to the various expressions of the faiths under review.

Aladuras, dangerous prophecies and the millennium

Behind the aladura emphasis on prophecy was a concern to impress upon others that the African also had an aptitude for such a gift. One of the most prominent figures in the aladura revival which swept through Yorubaland in the 1930s, Daniel Orekoya, was hailed in the above mentioned Yoruba News as:

> "A fulfilment of Biblical prophecy as far as we Africans are concerned."[101]

Prophecy and modern bureaucratic procedure do not blend easily. And aladura prophecy, especially where it contained this cultural-nationalist emphasis, made the colonial administration highly suspicious and nervous, in the way it was of mahdist pronouncements. To the administration aladura prophets were dangerous people who exploited the gullibility of the masses, despised the authority of the traditional rulers and threatened the peace and stability of society. The Resident of Oyo province in south-western Nigeria sought to have them banned and wrote to this effect to the Oni of Ife and the Owa of Ilesha ordering them to prohibit the aladura from establishing themselves in any part of Ife or Ilesha districts on the grounds that they were:

> "rascals who used their so called religion for the enjoyment of promiscuous sexual licence contrary to all native custom and good order and are enemies of Oba and parental control."[102]

Certainly the crowds, the vast majority of whom, reports suggest, were women, threatened chaos as they blocked the highways in their stampede to hear the prophets preach and to be cured of their various ailments. This gave cause for alarm as more than one colonial report makes clear, as did the apocalyptic, oppositional tone and content of some of the prophecies uttered by the leaders of the aladura movement which were unlikely to endear them to the colonial authorities.[103]

According to an official report:

> " a favourite subject of the preaching of these people (aladuras) is tax and they generally urge the people not to pay more than three shillings while one fixed the limit at one shilling."[104]

The so called dangerous prophecies of Oshitelu, the previously mentioned founder of the Church of the Lord, Aladura, and acquaintance of Muhammad Jumat Imam, gave rise to considerable apprehension in government circles. Regarded as being among the more dangerous of his "dangerous prophecies" was the one in which he predicted:

> "Things will be exorbitant this year (1931) up to about seven years time which will be the worst year (sic)."[105]

Another foretold of the danger of wars and riots, and another that:

> "something is coming down on the black people's land to an extent that all white men who live in it will perish".[106]

Among the other prophecies of Oshitelu which the police found to be "seditious" and "dangerous" was his predictions of the destruction of several towns:

> " by epidemics and thunderbolts if the people of these towns do not have faith and turn away from their evil ways."[107]

No one in authority could have been happy about the millenarian vision which Oshitelu frequently presented to his listeners, telling them:

> "When the kingdom of Christ has come, the kingdom of this world of falsehood and defraud (sic). . .will be destroyed."[108]

As already indicated, Oshitelu could also be very directly anti-European and anti-government, stating with regard to the European presence in Africa:

> " Epidemic of smallpox is coming to the land of Africa, so much that all the Europeans in the continent will die of it".

And with regard to the colonial regime:

> "The day is coming when the Government will be demanding taxes on goats and sheep every year. As a result domestic animals will be at liberty to feed in the open places without anybody to claim their ownership. . .Those who collect taxes and money on land, and other things. . .the judgement of God is upon them."[109]

As Turner points out, the authorities appear to have overlooked some of the more inflammatory prophecies contained in Oshitelu's three booklets published by the Ibadan Press in 1931. One bluntly proclaimed the destruction of the older churches "because they know nothing but money", another the destruction of Islam, except for those saved into the

"Israel of God", while another accuses the "white man" of having obtained all he possesses by violence.[110]

Oshitelu was not alone in preaching defiance of colonial authority, or in predicting chaos and confusion and in raising people's hopes and expectations in a new dawn, a new age. Moreover, what is also of direct relevance to this study, is that Oshitelu preached of a New Covenant between his people and God, of the advent of a New Jerusalem and of the building of a New Temple, themes that Muhammad Jumat Imam was to take up in 1942, the year in which he declared himself to be the Mahdi-Messiah and some twelve years after Oshitelu had founded his Church of the Lord, Aladura in the Ijebu town of Ogere. Muhammad Jumat Imam's Mahdiyya movement clearly had much in common with this aladura church, and these common threads will be taken up again in several of the later chapters, especially chapters five and eight.

The future Mahdi-Messiah also drew on the millenarian ideas found in the traditional religion. Although the emphasis, as was shown above, was very much on this-worldly concerns, as already indicated, the millenarian dimension, perhaps a result of contact with Christianity, was not unknown in traditional society and Idowu, for example, writes of the Yoruba god Ela as the messiah of the Traditional religion who rectifies destinies.[111] The same scholar mentions how this god came to be associated by Traditionalists with Jesus[112] while others have examined the various attempts made to associate the traditional god Orunmila or Ifa, the oracle divinity, with Jesus in several of his roles.[113] On the other hand, this coupling of traditional religion and Christianity was often done to illustrate the similarities in belief between the two for the purpose of demonstrating that the former was the divinely appointed way of preparing the Yoruba intellectually to receive the truths of the latter. For example, Orunmila, as Olowa or the one who holds the highest authority on earth and in heaven, was presented as prefiguring Christ the King. Moreover, the fact that he scored a victory over disease and death also clearly indicated that Orunmila was the

divinely constructed, pre-Christian Yoruba model of Jesus, the saviour.[114] However, there were also those who, in a more nationalistic vein, were to reverse the argument and claim that Jesus was Orunmila.[115]

For similar reasons, Muhammad Jumat Imam was to claim that the prophet Muhammad was not the last of the prophets. He was to argue, as will be seen in chapter five, that God, since he had given other races their own prophet, of necessity and in justice, chose in him, a black messiah, to save the black race, an argument that suggests that the millenarian movement under discussion here was just as preoccupied with discovering the place of black people in God's plan of salvation as with anything else.

Conclusion

The furniture in a prophet's mental loft is not, as was suggested at the outset of this chapter, all of the same make and in the foregoing we have attempted to show something of the varied and rich spiritual and cultural heritage on which Muhammad Jumat Imam could draw, of the range of spiritual beliefs and experiences available to him, and of the purposes which they could be made to serve.

The beliefs were many and embraced the belief in dreams as sources of supernatural revelation, in the power of the word to change the way things are or will be, in supernatural manifestations, in prophecy and in a messianic kingdom. Moreover, they often dovetailed in the sense that they were to be found in more than one, if not all three religions.

It was beliefs such as these which created a basis for understanding and sympathy between Muhammad Jumat Imam and the Ijebu. However, to have illustrated that there was no fundamental incompatibility between the millenarian beliefs of Muhammad Jumat Imam and popular religious belief in Ijebuland and to have pointed to the ideological and social connections between the millenarian movement which he founded and a number of existing Islamic and Christian movements, in particular the Ahmadiyya movement and the Aladura

churches respectively, is not to have explained why his particular brand of chiliasm appealed to so many. For this we must turn to the constitutional crisis that engulfed Ijebu-Ode from the middle years of the 1930s for an explanation of the relevance of the millenarianism preached by Muhammad Jumat Imam to what was considered to be a deep-seated and humanly speaking intractable problem of authority that was then tearing society apart.

It was this issue, as well as that of coming to terms with modernisation without losing one's identity, that his millenarianism sought to address. And while his message meant somewhat different things to different people, as chapter six shows, at a general level it was one of the few readily available and convincing ideologies of change in this rapidly changing and deeply divided society, left to all intents and purposes directionless and leaderless by the constitutional crisis provoked by the introduction of the "Sole Native Authority". This system, as the following chapter attempts to show, destroyed any remaining legitimacy that the traditional ruler, a sacred king, might have continued to enjoy. And, in so doing, it provided the millenarian prophet with the anomic stage on which he could perform his role as healer of those wounds inflicted on individuals and society by discord and as guide through the confusion created by modernization.

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Chapter 3: The crisis of royal legitimacy and the making of the millenarian milieu

Pre-colonial Ijẹbuland was by all accounts a highly self-contained and integrated politico-religious entity, and this was due in great measure to the symbolic, moral and the more matter of fact benefits it derived from its religion.[1] One of the last independent rulers of the kingdom, awujale (king) Ademiyewo Fidipote (1841-86), reportedly told emissaries of the British colonial administration in Lagos and the Christian missionaries who sought to enter his territory to spread their faith that:

> "the religion of the Ijebu ministered absolutely satisfactorily to all the needs and aspirations of his country, making his people more prosperous, peace-loving, law abiding and honest in their dealings with others."[2]

It was not, however, a static society opposed to all that was new and different. Although Christianity, as just noted, was unwelcome and, like Islam, kept out, there was room for new beliefs and cults, some of which were allowed to replace old ones, but only, it must be added, on condition that they could be seen to constitute part of Tradition. In this sense changes, facilitated and regulated by ritual, the principal means by which society was kept aware of the constant principles behind the apparent chaos and flux of sensory experience, did take place. The change in belief and attitude toward twins is but one example of innovation. Once seen as a supernatural sign of their mother's immoral behaviour and either left to die or ritually put to death, twins came to be regarded as divinely favoured.[3] Therefore, in keeping with what has just been said on the nature of the process of change, it was not the emergence of a new social and cultural theory that led to the acceptance of twins but rather a series of interrelated developments that included: the reworking in relation to childbirth, twins and women, of traditional concepts of fate, the role of the trickster divinity, Eshu, and the sphere of responsibility of the supreme being, Olorun, also known as Olodumare.

Innovation, then, was possible if it could be construed as having its origins in Tradition.[4] This way of presenting innovations - as having their origins in the past, as being part of

"ancient wisdom" - satisfied the Ijebu need for a history without gaps, a past without breaks. The same anxiety to conceal the fact of change, in particular unprecedented change, was by no means peculiar to Ijebu society or to pre-colonial African societies in general. Thomas, for example, says of political thought in early Stuart England:

> "Political argument took the form of legal controversy - determining just what the law was - and all discussion was conducted on the fictitious assumption of an unchanging constitutional structure. Not until the mid seventeenth century did the strain of attempting to make all political demands harmonise with a fictitious model of the past become too much. The links snapped, and for the first time men were prepared to assert the inherent merit of a political programme, regardless of whether or not it had previously been put into effect. Yet, even then, most political thought remained essentially an enquiry into origins; happenings in the state of nature or some other version of the primitive past still determined men's political obligations in the present."[5]

In pre-colonial Ijebuland, therefore, as in Stuart England, the sting was taken out of raw, naked change - and even sharp twists and turns in government policy - by showing it to be in harmony with the past. This could not be done, however, in the case of colonization, particularly when it was seen to have radically replaced traditional constitutional arrangements, as was the case in Nigeria with the introduction of the system of "Indirect Rule".

The British expedition to and conquest of Ijebuland in 1892 and the imposition of "Indirect Rule" in 1916 not only put an end to Ijebu self-containment and integration but also inaugurated an epoch of unprecedented change, made all the more difficult to comprehend, control and domesticate by the fact that the kingdom no longer possessed either the means, in the form of a validating charter, of maintaining the fiction of an unbroken continuity between past and present events, or any religious or political leader capable of forging out of the disparate elements that it left in its wake any semblance of unity and cohesion. Moreover, while the Ijebu were experiencing such change in its raw, naked form, so to speak, Islam and Christianity were now establishing themselves in the kingdom, and although these new religions, and in particular the latter, provided for some both the

cognitive map and the skills to cope with the impact of the new order, they, nevertheless, had the effect of further undermining the indigenous system of social psychology, the traditional religion, depriving many, as a consequence, of any reassurance that what was taking place was part of some larger plan which their gods and ancestors had sanctioned. Not only did it pass from relative stability and prosperity to novel kinds and unprecedented levels of religious, economic and political change that brought in its train much insecurity and division in so short a period of time, indeed within the living memory of very many of its citizens, but Ijebu society was further bewildered by the fears and anxiety generated by a series of disasters including World War I, the influenza epidemic (1918) and the yellow fever epidemic (1924) that came hard on its heels, and then World War II.

The impact of these wars, and not only their economic, political and social but also their psychological impact on West Africans, is only now being realised. Osuntokun, among others, has provided some idea of the fears and uncertainty aroused by World War I in southern Nigeria.[6] As to feelings of insecurity generated by World War II, something of these can be glimpsed at from the recollections of a previously mentioned Archbishop of the Cherubim and Seraphim church, an aladura church, at Ibadan:

> ". . .about three years before the "Hitler War" we were instructed in a vision to pray that the War would not come. We told the government in Lagos of this vision...We were told that the existence of the League of Nations made war impossible...We continued to make known our vision and to ask people to pray that the War would not come very soon. About a month before it came God told us in another vision to go and tell them (sic) that it would come soon. We preached this all over the country and in September 1939 the War started. . .Then we prayed and fasted in relays - we were six million - throughout the War that Hitler would be defeated. Some fasted from Mondays to Wednesdays, others from Wednesdays to Fridays and others on Saturdays and Sundays. Like this we did not get tired. In a vision God told us that Hitler would send powder into the air to kill people. We prayed that it would not come in our direction... At a certain stage we heard that Hitler had overrun France and we prayed that he would be stopped from crossing over to England because if he did he would take over all the British colonies and that would mean us as well."[7]

Many Nigerians took an active part in this War, especially after the fall of Singapore in 1942, and for the millenarian prophet, Muhammad Jumat Imam, it produced a universally

recognizable dajjal or Antichrist in the form of Hitler and, in addition, much of the imagery and the clearest possible omen in support of his claim that the End of Time was close at hand.[8]

However, while the Islamic millenarian movement in Ijebuland studied here fed off this catastrophe it would probably not have occurred, or at least not in the form it was to take, but for the above mentioned constitutional crisis. This explains why the principal focus of this chapter is on the nature and extent of the ideological confusion produced by the introduction of the "Sole native Authority" system in 1916. To illustrate the difference that this system made it will be necessary to consider in more detail here the traditional constitutional arrangements and in particular the constitutional position of the awujale or king of Ijebuland.

The Awujale as priest-king and symbol of Ijebu legitimacy.

In traditional Ijebu society, as in other Yoruba societies, the universe, as was noted in the previous chapter, was perceived as a vast hierarchical order ranging from Olorun, God, at the apex, down to the last creature. Next to Olorun were the first parents, regarded as the founders of the different tribes and the highest of the intermediaries between humans and God. This "metaphysical hierarchy" provided the framework for political theory, a framework which was supported by the myths of origin of the world. Moreover, these myths constituted a charter for the myths of origin of the kingdom which in turn sanctioned the position of the ruler as the "divine" sovereign of his people.[9] As Fortes summarised it:

> "All these myths of origin become intelligible when it is realised that they are nothing more than a formulation of the contemporary scheme of political and ceremonial relationships."[10]

The awujale, by his de jure and de facto power, and as the symbolic representative of Ijebu society, was an essential and integral part of the governmental system of Ijebuland. Through his royal ancestry he was linked with the mythical founder of Ijebu-Ode, Obanta,

and thus symbolised the historical identity, continuity and legitimacy of the kingdom qua kingdom. Indeed, Ijebu attitudes to the founder and the foundation of Ijebu-Ode recall Fustel de Coulanges's comment regarding the founder and foundation of the "ancient" city:

> " We are surprised, at first, when we see in the ancient authors that there was no city, however ancient it might be, which did not pretend to know the name of its founder and the date of its foundation. This is because the city could not lose the recollection of the sacred ceremony which had marked its birth. For every year it celebrated the anniversary of its birthday with a sacrifice."[11]

The awujale, furthermore, symbolised what might be termed the "international" legitimacy of the Ijebu people by virtue of his descent from the common ancestor of the Yoruba, Oduduwa. But essential to his symbolic importance to Ijebu "asabiyya" or group feeling, was the awujale's direct relationship with the gods (orisa) which provided him with a sacred or numinous legitimacy.

The basis of this direct relationship was the belief that Obanta, the name, as already indicated of the first awujale of Ijebuland, came from the "centre of the world," Ile-Ife, was a descendent of Oduduwa, in some Yoruba myths creator of the earth and its inhabitants, and was, according to Ijebu mythology, a divine king. And it was on the basis of this myth that the Ijebu maintained that their kings, the awujales, were endowed with a sacred or priestly character. This myth, as noted in the previous chapter, was reinforced at the coronation ceremony which included the rite of retracing the route by which the founder was believed to have entered the Kingdom and the symbolic eating of the heart of their royal predecessor, deriving from this ritual act the mystical powers of office.

The numerous taboos, previously referred to, surrounding the person of the king also served, as Parrinder has explained, to emphasise his numinous character. It was believed that the monarch, being a god, had no natural parents, and no natural wants such as eating, and so dined alone with the attendant who served him turning away his head as his master ate. The king spent a great deal of his time alone. In Ijebuland it was customary for the awujale to remain out of sight only appearing in public three times a year, at the Bere, Ebi

and Agemo festivals in February, October and July respectively. In 1887 a European visitor described the then awujale as:

> ". . .a man of unusually lofty stature, dressed in flowering satin clothes, with huge long boots worked all over with small beads, and on his head a hat of the shape of a water funnel, worked over with beads, and with two sets of four birds worked in beads around the upper part, and a single such bird on the top. From the back and the sides of this head-gear hung strings of beads, and from the front a silk hat which partially concealed his face. He carried a small wooden sceptre, with a brass image with small bells attached at one end, a horse tail at the other.
> Each of his arms was supported by an attendant and another attendant carried the huge many colored umbrella of state over his head while four men watched his feet lest he should step on anything obnoxious, and he was conducted to his seat under the veranda like a blind man."[12]

Although there is no evidence of any direct borrowing, all of this is reminiscent of the mai (king) of the old Islamic state of Kanem-Borno, part of which is situated in modern day Nigeria. Mai Idris, an observer noted:

> " does not appear to the people and does not address them except from behind a curtain."[13]

The sacred character of the king (reth) of the Shilluk kingdom in the Sudan, of the Swazi king (nkosi) and the Kabaka of Uganda, among others, was also emphasised by seclusion and dress.

To further underline his sacred character the awujale was expected to be "abidagba": that is of royal blood inherited through patrilineal descent, born of a free mother while his father was still on the throne, of unimpeachable integrity and without physical deformity.[14] The British official on the spot showed, to his cost, his disregard for such criteria when he decided to appoint an awujale in 1916 who fulfilled few if any of the "abidagba" criteria. The awujale in question was the son of a slave mother, an ex-convict and was physically defective in that he had one toe missing. The strength of local opposition to this appointment by the then British resident in Ijebu province, Young, led to it being overturned by the colonial administration in Lagos in 1917.[15]

As to his relationship to other chiefs the awujale of Ijebuland was the chief priest to whom

subordinate chiefs sent tribute and who performed the appropriate rituals on their behalf and on behalf of all his subjects. His palace (afin) contained the shrines and houses of all the deities worshipped in the kingdom. Situated in the centre of the capital of Ijebuland, Ijebu-Ode, and separated from the outside world by a high wall, the royal palace was the sacred axis on which the peace, prosperity and social cohesion of the kingdom turned. Moreover, like other Yoruba towns, Ijebu-Ode was a ceremonial city, an analogical representation of the world, or in the words of one authority on Yoruba cities a "ritual paradigm of the order of society". Furthermore, regarding the effect of important civic ritual actions, this did not come about in ex opere operato fashion; it needed the presence of the king, at least if it were to be beneficial to all Ijebu.

Thus, as the representative on earth of all the gods, the awujale's attendance at public acts of worship was considered essential to their efficacy. These were often ritual enactments of the foundation myths which, with the awujale presiding, provided a symbolic illustration of the relationship between the members of the body politic and their existence as a society, something "Indirect Rule" in the form of the "Sole Native Authority" system destroyed.[16]

Indirect rule and the crisis of awujaleship legitimacy

Prior to the British conquest the awujale of Ijebuland, according to Lloyd, was not himself the sole decision maker but simply the one whose assent was necessary to validate the decisions reached by his immediate advisers, the ilamuren, chosen from certain lineages of the aristocracy of Ijebu-Ode, and the odi, who were the guardians of his person and of secret rituals.[17] Ayandele presents a similar picture of the power of the pre-colonial king of Ijebuland stating that:

> " In no circumstances did the awujale. . .initiate or execute laws, although laws bore the stamp of his office."[18]

A good king ruled with the consent of his people as "represented" by the councilors and

when this principle was ignored he was seen to have violated tradition and by way of penalty was asked to die.

The awujale could, then, be opposed and even deposed. It must be borne in mind, however, that in deposing a particular awujale the royal councilors never questioned the right to rule of the members of the royal lineage to which he belonged, providing, of course, that they were "abidagba".[19] Nor did deposition constitute an attack on the established order which continued to be regarded as just and sacred. Thus, while, the constitution permitted ritual rebellion it precluded the possibility of revolution.[20] Max Weber's characterization of the form and content of resistance to traditional authority aptly describes the situation in pre-colonial Ijebuland:

> " When resistance occurs it is directed against the person of a chief or a member of his staff. The accusation is that he has failed to observe the traditional limits of his authority. Opposition is not directed against the system itself."[21]

These rules no longer applied, of course, when "The Sole Native Authority" system was introduced. Then the opposition became opposition to the system, the reason being that the colonial administration, by investing the ruler with absolute authority under its own supervision, not only effected the destruction of the Ijebu traditional system of representative government but also undermined the mythological basis of Ijebu social identity and unity. Moreover, in turning him into a direct appointee of the administration with both new and extraordinary powers the colonial government destroyed the awujale's numinous and civil legitimacy which were in practice inseparable, a point of great importance when attempting to understand the prolonged and bitter opposition to the "Sole Native Authority"system.

The opposition would probably not have been so lasting and so fierce had the traditional constitutional arrangements proved to be totally ineffective. However, the evidence suggests that the Ijebu constitutional system functioned reasonably satisfactorily prior to the British occupation. The Nigerian Anglican bishop, James Johnson, whose ministry took him to

western Nigeria, wrote:

> "It is a well known thing that before the late war (the British conquest of Ijebuland in 1892) there was no province throughout what is generally regarded as Yoruba country where the king's authority was so much respected as in Ijebu province".[22]

The reality was somewhat different, as just noted, from Johnson's description of the working of the pre-1892 Ijebu constitutional and political system. Moreover, those who lost power and authority as a result of the colonial occupation and the constitutional changes that followed, and those who were to engage in the nationalist struggle from the late 1930s, doubtless tended to exaggerate both the extent to which the traditional constitution was democratic and the degree of respect it enjoyed in order to further highlight the autocratic character of "Indirect Rule" in the form of the "Sole Native Authority" system.[23] Ironically, some of the colonial political officers whose task it was to implement it imagined that the system was inspired by the belief that:

> "European and African were culturally distinct although not necessarily unequal and that the institutions of government most suited to the latter were those which he had devised for himself".[24]

"Indirect Rule" was also the result of more practical considerations such as the paucity of administrative personnel, the lack of resources as well as the need to avoid arousing militant opposition.[25] However, it was never the intention to allow traditional political systems to remain unchanged if they were considered ineffective or morally unacceptable. It was the responsibility of a European political officer to supervise and guide the development of indigenous political institutions turning them into more efficient units of administration. As the architect of the system, Lord Lugard explained, "Indirect Rule" was to be:

> "a dynamic system of local government."[26]

Although a general pattern of "Indirect Rule" had emerged by the 1920s the actual concrete form and the effects of the system, given the variety of pre-colonial constitutional arrangements, differed from one region to region. However, it is possible to make a number

of generalizations as to its political consequences, one of them being that in south-western and eastern Nigeria and in the former British colony of the Gold Coast, Ghana, "Indirect Rule" tended to strengthen the power of the local ruler in relation to the councils of state, thus weakening the traditional system of checks and balances. Also, it had the effect, as already indicated, of weakening the ideological basis on which traditional rule was founded. What Rattray said with reference to the Gold Coast (Ghana) applied equally to south-western Nigeria, including Ijebuland. He commented:

> "In introducing Indirect Rule. . .we would therefore appear to be encouraging on the one hand an institution which draws its inspiration and validity from the indigenous religious belief system while on the other we are destroying the very foundations on which the structure we are striving to perpetuate stands. Its shell and outward form may remain, but it would seem too much to expect that its vital energy could survive such a process".[27]

Lord Lugard had introduced the system in the Muslim emirates of northern Nigeria between 1901-1906 and was determined when he became Governor General of Nigeria in 1912 to implement a version of the system in southern Nigeria, and this over against a nineteenth century background which had seen a diminution of chiefly power in this area of the country, and also in the context of a small but growing and increasingly influential western educated elite.[28]

Not only were their executive powers strengthened by the "Sole Native Authorities" act but chiefs (oba) were also charged with a variety of extremely delicate tasks which, if their execution was not to provoke strong protest, needed to be at least seen to have the cooperation and support of the traditional decision-making bodies. For example, like the emirs, their counterparts in the North, the chiefs or oba in the South were charged by the administration with the duty of collecting taxes, a duty which they had never previously undertaken and one which the Ijebu were to constantly oppose on the grounds that there could be no lawful taxation without representation. Furthermore, instead of being paid in the customary way by tribute the chiefs received their salary directly from government out

of money raised from the much detested system of direct taxation.

In southern Nigeria, then, the "Sole Native Authority" form of "Indirect Rule" gave sweeping powers to principal chiefs or oba, including the Alafin of Oyo, the Alake of Abeokuta, the Oni of Ife and the Awujale of Ijebuland, turning them into quasi absolute monarchs at a time when much of what little traditional authority they had once exercised had been lost.[29] The change, therefore, turned what we have previously described as constitutional monarchs into rulers on the lines of the much more powerful northern Nigerian emirs who acted as undisputed heads of the local administration and ruled through a system of lesser chiefs.

Furthermore, nothing was done to ease the tension created by this constitutional change by the considerable variation in the salaries paid to chiefs, the "Sole Native Authority" chiefs receiving much higher payment than others not of this category but with equally wide ranging duties and responsibilities.

Serious violence erupted and millenarian movements arose in many parts of southern Nigeria largely as a consequence of these innovations. As an example of the latter kind of response we can point to the activity of a certain Garrick Braide, a member of the Anglican Church in New Calabar, who proclaimed himself to be Elijah II and started a popular movement described in The Times of the day as "a dangerous pseudo-christian movement" that preached that power was soon to pass from whites to blacks.[30] According to another newspaper, The African Mail, Braide was:

> "...another Mahdi under whose banner are flocking millions of natives ready to attempt to overthrow the British raj."[31]

It was, it has already been stressed more than once, this constitutional crisis that eventually opened up a millenarian milieu in which the Ijebu Mahdi-Messiah's promise of a New Jerusalem, a new order of harmony and unity, appeared to many to offer the only hope of escape from the existing turmoil and disarray.

Although by no means the only change of significance and importance, the constitutional change allowing for a "Sole Native Authority" system was perhaps the most traumatic of all the innovations to affect Ijebuland in this period, and one for which no acceptable solution was ever found, not even when its most enthusiastic supporter, the awujale (king) of Ijebuland, Daniel Adesanya, agreed in principle in 1949 to share power with the various interest groups that opposed his rule.

Nor, following Weber, could such a solution have been found: for the "Sole Native Authority" system, a colonial construct, not only left the Ijebu without any legitimate reason to obey either their king (awujale) or the new king makers, the colonial authority, but also without the means of incorporating such a change into Tradition. Briefly, Weber identified three types of "belief" system which legitimate relations of domination - legal, traditional, and charismatic.[32] The first, legal authority, is based on the belief in the legality of impersonal rules and in the procedures for making and applying rules. The third type, charismatic authority, which will be discussed at greater length in chapters five and six, is distinguished by its unstable dynamism, and in contrast to legal authority which implies stable, continuing relationships and obedience to rules, is short lived and characterised by obedience to a person of imputed holiness, heroism or some extraordinary quality.[33] Traditional forms of authority relations such as those that characterised pre-colonial Ijebu society, rest on habitual attitudes and beliefs in the legitimacy of standardised and sanctified practices.[34]

It was this last mentioned form of authority, traditional authority, that the 1916 constitutional change did as much, if not more than anything else, including by that time western education and foreign evangelism, to undermine. The change was perceived by those who had most to lose by the passing of the "Old Order" as a clear expression of colonialism's intention to construct alternative systems of morality, power and status based on different criteria from those that were understood to have the sanction and support of

immemorial custom.

Moreover, people felt deceived for this change was both unexpected and contrary to what the colonial regime had at the outset promised: respect for traditional beliefs and institutions. Indeed it must have looked like a complete volte-face on the part of the administration for not only had the British presence in Ijebuland led to little immediate change but the first effects of the arrival of colonialism was to restore to the awujale the authority that was rightly his according to Ijebu tradition, an authority that had been all but usurped a short time previously by the age-grades mentioned in the previous chapter.

Thus, with the awujale restored to his traditional constitutional role as primus inter pares, there was little evidence of any profound change in Ijebuland until 1916 and the introduction of the "Sole Native Authority" system, and even for some time after that date. Indeed, until the early 1930s the king, despite the constitutional change represented by the introduction of the "Sole Native Authority" exercised power as in the past and, as in the past, could be influenced, manipulated and even overruled. Furthermore, his advisers, the ilamuren, and the odis, priests in the royal palace, still retained a degree of control over both the decisions and the appointment of the awujale. The Ijebu Provincial Reports submitted to the colonial headquarters in Lagos show that after 1916, as before that date, the awujale was quite prepared to accept advice from his councilors. The Resident of Ijebu Province, Amaury Talbot, wrote, for example, in his 1924 report:

> "The awujale is very weak but always willing to take advice. The olisa is his chief adviser and chief spokesman at all meetings".[35]

Furthermore, they were easily manipulated as the same resident's report for 1926 makes clear. Talbot wrote of Daniel Adesanya's predecessor, awujale Adenuga:

> "He, a shopkeeper/ shopboy, is very much in the hands of his council especially the Olisa and is swayed by the opinions of the literate."[36]

Moreover, kings continued to be appointed after consultation with the traditional councilors and were mostly "abidagba". Awujales, therefore, possessed a degree of legitimacy, and as

a consequence of the customary manner in which they continued to rule so also did the traditional system of domination, for almost two decades after the introduction of the "Sole Native Authority "system in 1916, in fact until the appointment of the already mentioned western, educated Christian, Daniel Adesanya, as awujale in 1933. This was the first time that an Ijebu king attempted to use to the full the executive powers vested in him by the "Sole Native Authority" system and from that time onwards no one was left in any doubt that the new awujale was set on a complete break with traditional Ijebu constitutional practice.

The appointment of Daniel Adesanya as awujale was not only regarded as the clearest proof to date of the colonial government's intention to promote candidates with a western education in preference to others but even more importantly of its support for a completely new redemptive process - redemption, as Burridge explains, having a bearing on the politico-economic, prestige and status systems as well as on the spiritual life of a people.[37]

Indeed, the colonial governor, Donald Cameron, admitted as much, and although aware of the strength of the local opposition to the appointment of the new king, explained the thinking behind the decision to the five hundred invited guests at the installation ceremony. He told them:

> " It must be remembered that Native Law and Custom cannot be regarded as immutable but as subject to modification, if necessary, to meet the new circumstances of a more advanced and enlightened age."

Cameron continued:

> " The new awujale's task is not an easy one but he has the advantages of education and the knowledge of the problems of modern life." [38]

The Resident of Ijebu Province in his report on "Native Officers" for 1934 spoke in the same vein as Cameron, describing the awujale as:

> " a chief of high principles. . .fully literate and intelligent with no illusions about the character of his people who are for the most part primitive. . .and one who realises the need to modernise.."[39]

This emphasis on education as the road to advancement increased the resentment between those who had acquired their qualifications for office in the traditional way and those who, armed with a western education, were now challenging them. The feelings of the former at being elbowed out by the western educated parvenu was expressed by one local poet in this way:

> " Those we met sitting on the floor are today the top men of modern times. Status is now based on modern education. The talk of being the son of so and so is over."[40]

This notwithstanding, one might, nevertheless, have expected so widely detested an innovation as the "Sole Native Authority" system to have united the Ijebu and provided them with a sense of common purpose at a time of rapid social change. However, although most Ijebu, either sooner or later and often for different reasons, opposed the introduction of the "Sole Native Authority" system this opposition, far from binding them together in a common effort to have it replaced, drove them further apart than ever and in every sense, religiously, politically, morally and culturally. It brought to the surface, moreover, the growing divide between Christians and Muslims and between both of these world religions and the Traditional religion, and at the same time sharpened the internal divisions within Christianity and Islam. The absence of "official" mediators, as in the past, and of a widely accepted constitutional mechanism for settling disputes between rival factions, should they arise, were some of the principal reasons why society was so disoriented and fraught with such divisions during the campaign against the "Sole Native Authority" system. In the past, the traditional Ijebu priest acted as the mediator between rival cult groups in dispute and Evans-Pritchard as did the Nuer priest priest. With regard to the crucial part played by the leopard skin priest in conflict resolution Evans-Pritchard wrote:

> "It is necessary that they should be widely spread, because their services are essential to Nuer everywhere, and it is significant that they are generally not members of lineages identified with political groups, because they have to act as peacemakers between such groups (my emphasis)."[41]

However, in Ijebuland by the 1930s when Muslims and Christians, counted together, had by far outstripped the "pagans", the cleric, whether Christian, Muslim or Traditionalist, had become a partisan figure leaving the society bereft of its reconciliators. And it was precisely this key role that Muhammad Jumat Imam attempted to fulfil by declaring himself to be the Mahdi of the Muslims and the Messiah of the Christians.[42] But before discussing this further we need to describe in some detail the response to the awujaleship crisis of legitimacy of the many different interest groups in order to illustrate its decisive role in and contribution toward the disorder and confusion that beset Ijebu society in the 1930s and facilitated the rise of the Mahdiyya movement.

The Christian, educated elite and the constitutional crisis

Although officially barred, as we have seen, from entering Ijebuland in the pre-colonial period the Christian missionaries soon began to evangelise there openly and lawfully after the British conquest in 1892 which for many of them signalled the beginnings of the triumph of "civilization" over "barbarism". One of the principal methods of evangelization was the mission school system which was to produce by the 1920s and 1930s a confident and self-assertive Christian, western-educated, elite having among its members the already mentioned Daniel Adesanya, awujale Gbelegbuwa II.

The western education brought by the Christian missionaries was to completely alter so much of the traditional way of life. Among other things, it established, as we have seen, new criteria for assessing leadership potential, replacing the criteria of age and wisdom derived from knowledge about the past and traditional culture with literacy. This turned on its head the traditional system of advancement allowing the young, western-educated person to claim the right to a position of authority on the grounds of competence in "foreign" ways. Moreover, the newly educated in the western system tended to be dismissive of traditional authority and customary ways of behaving and dressing, their schooling providing them with "valid" reasons for this and even for withdrawing loyalty to a

traditional, "pagan" ruler not only in religious but also in other matters.

In this Christians also had the support of their clerics, one of whom, the Anglican clergyman and headmaster of Ijebu-Ode Grammar school, in 1913 led a two hundred strong delegation to request the colonial administration to deprive the traditional rulers of all political and judicial powers on the grounds that they were ignorant and possessed no sense of responsibility.[43] In the "New Africa" which he and his fellow Christians saw emerging only the literate could provide the necessary leadership. And as a leading Ijebu lay Christian Timothy Odutola insisted at the time, hereditary rank and ascribed status belonged to the "Old Order" which was now dead.[44]

Traditional authority and traditional values and beliefs were both openly and tacitly undermined in numerous other ways by the western educated from assaults on "pagan" groves to demands in the name of individual liberty to make use of traditional symbols of royalty such as the umbrella.[45] All pointed to the fact that western educated Christians had taken on a new identity, and that their church was something of a state within a state with its own religious hierarchy, symbols, rituals, laws, ethical and moral code and its own spiritual and moral guides and educators whose authority and influence were extended to cover areas such as land allocation, farm boundary disputes and taxation, areas once under the jurisdiction of the local chief and his council.[46]

At first this Christian, western educated elite welcomed the appointment of Daniel Adesanya as awujale, seeing in him a more qualified and suitable champion of a future "New Africa" based on Christian principles and western education and which, it believed, it had been destined to lead. It also perceived very quickly not only the political but also the economic advantages that flowed from education and power.[47]

However, the elite quickly came to realise that its confidence in the new awujale was misplaced; from the outset he displayed what they regarded as undemocratic, absolutist tendencies, and showed himself unwilling to share his authority with anyone. For example,

when approached by the elite to discuss how it might participate more actively in government this western educated awujale, ironically, had recourse to tradition in defence of his autocratic style quoting an Ijebu dictum -"Oba o! Oba ase" (the awujale is the chief, the chief invested with all powers).[48]

This, of course, was not only a distortion of Ijebu constitutional theory but highly inappropriate to Ijebu society in the 1930s. By then this society had become far more heterogeneous having experienced a significant shift from mechanical to organic solidarity with the advent of Christianity and Islam which, as previously noted, were rapidly outstripping the traditional religion as the dominant belief systems. By the mid-1930s Ijebu-Ode Grammar school alone had turned out almost one thousand students two of whom had become Anglican bishops, while others were successful journalists and barristers.

Ijebuland, moreover, was not only a pluralistic society but also a bifurcated society. There were at least two versions of everything. As we saw in the previous chapter, an indigenous version of Christianity in the form of the aladura movement had arisen after the First World War, not to mention the variety of other Christian bodies including the Jehovah Witnesses, all of which were at some level or combination of levels - doctrinal, liturgical and ethical among others - offering an alternative interpretation of the faith from that of the mission-based churches, represented in the main by the Anglican church to which Daniel Adesanya belonged. Likewise there was orthodox Islam in competition with the Tijaniyya brotherhood, wrongly regarded by the Ijebu as heretical, and the Ahmadiyya version of Islam which had entered Ijebu in the late 1920s. Furthermore, as already indicated, within mainstream Islam there were the modernizers who wanted to update their faith so that Muslims could compete on a par with Christians and, as Bidmus has shown, a growing number of conservative, anti-modern hard line Muslims.[49]

There was also bifurcation in the educational, economic, political and moral spheres and even in the residential pattern of the capital with the colonial officials occupying one area

and the local inhabitants another. Even the cemeteries - one for Europeans, one for Muslims, another for Traditionalists and one each for Catholics and Protestants - highlighted the heterogeneous character of what was until very recently a closed, homogeneous society.

To return to its response to the awujale's autocratic stance, the elite protested that the king was acting arbitrarily and abusing his powers and claimed that he would find no support for his style of government in either British or traditional constitutional principles.[50] It then launched a campaign to enlist the support of the Traditionalists against the awujale and the "Sole Native Authority System" that allowed him to exercise power in such an autocratic fashion.

This alliance was made possible by the new interpretation which the educated elite, now seriously thinking of independence, placed on the traditional constitutional arrangements, arguing that in principle there was no difference between these and the British system of democracy which they would like to see established in Ijebuland. However, while the alliance complicated matters for a short time for both the awujale and the colonial administration who could no longer dismiss the educated elite as a group of unrepresentative and power hungry agitators, in practice the latter never became for any significant length of time the effective leaders of the traditional opposition to the awujale and the "Sole Native Authority" system.

The break between the two groups was inevitable in that the educated elite at no time envisaged a return to the pre-1892 constitutional arrangements, the sole objective of the traditionalists. Through independence party, the Nigerian Youth Movement, the educated elite worked towards another goal. Among the principal aims of this movement were the:

> "unification of the different tribes of Nigeria in order to foster better understanding and co-operation, the education and organization of public opinion towards national consciousness and the obtaining of the natural right of youth to representation on local councils."[51]

It was this last mentioned objective that created the immediate rift between the Youth Movement and the olorituns, the leaders of the traditionalists. While the latter wanted to step back to the past and remain there the Nigerian Youth Movement sought to use the widespread belief in the existence of a pre-1892 democratic Ijebu constitution as a lever to extract political concessions from the colonial administration which would make it and not the olorituns the decision making body.

Therefore, although sympathetic to the outlook of the traditionalists and just as strongly opposed to the "Sole Native Authority System" the Nigerian Youth Movement saw no role for the former in the future government of an independent Nigeria. One of Nigeria's future political leaders in the post independence period and at the time a member of the Nigerian Youth Movement, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, while attacking the "Sole Native Authority" system as "extremely harmful to the political aspirations of Nigeria" also accused the traditional leaders of "having failed the nation" and urged people to:

> "follow the youth into the future rather than go backwards with the Olorituns".[52]

Some of Nigeria's churchmen were of the same mind as Awolowo regarding the traditionalists. The Methodist minister, the Reverend Odutola, told a gathering on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the British conquest of Ijebuland, May 20th 1942:

> "The purpose of our coming together is not to celebrate our defeat and unconditional surrender but to remind ourselves of the mistakes made by our forefathers which made the expedition necessary, inevitable and justifiable."[53]

While Awolowo and his associates in the Nigerian Youth Movement would not have agreed that the expedition was either necessary or justifiable they would certainly have endorsed the view that the traditional rulers had neither the ability nor the competence to defend and promote the interests of the Ijebu people. Moreover, the Nigerian Youth Movement and churchmen like Odutola were at one in making a sound Christian, western

education the prerequisite for leadership. For in Odutola's words:

> "Christian education brought hope of a better life and inspired man with a spiritual force which enabled him to extricate himself from the shackles of ignorance, fear and superstition." [54]

Thus, although they sometimes differed in their assessments of colonial rule, both independence politicians and churchmen opposed the "Sole Native Authority" system and shared the hope of a new dawn, of a new order, of a new Africa in which the "enemy of progress" the traditionalists would have no political power.

Traditionalists and the constitutional crisis

The "natural" leaders of the traditionalists were the above mentioned olorituns or ward heads, the "elected" representatives and councilors in the "Old Order" to the awujale, and it was they who had most to lose in the new dispensation. What they sought was, as already indicated, a return to the pre-1892 constitution under which they exercised considerable power and authority.[55] Their goal was not the establishment of elected councils to advise the awujale and act as a check on his authority, a demand of the western educated elite, but rather direct access to the ruler and the right to amend or nullify his decisions. Alienated from the new constitutional structures and deprived of influence and power they struggled for more than a decade for the restoration of the "Old Order", having recourse to a variety of forms of protest, mainly symbolic but also including "mystical" violence.

The most potently symbolic way the traditionalists had of expressing their rejection of the awujale was by not requesting his permission for or inviting him to preside at important religious ceremonies. For example, in 1942 ceremonies were performed at the sacred shrines in Ijebu-Ode without either the knowledge or the consent of the awujale, the clearest possible indication that his legitimacy and authority as Priest-King had been rejected. Moreover, these ceremonies performed as they were at uncanonical times, had another purpose. They were intended as a form of "mystical" attack on the king: it was

believed they could and would cause serious physical injury to the awujale who by his absence had forfeited the protection of the gods. Such physical impairment would emphasise still further the fact that Daniel Adesansya, who had lost an arm in an assassination attempt in 1934, failed to meet the "abidagba" requirements for office already mention.[56]

Mystical attacks and acts of religious rebellion continued with a view to deepening and widening the opposition to the awujale by demonstrating that his rule was detrimental to the well-being of all the people. Thus, in 1942 several other highly controversial and extremely dangerous attempts were made to discredit the king and alienate him still further from his subjects. For example, in July of that year the police found what was described as a "bundle of juju (magic)" in the capital's water supply system, having been allegedly placed there by the awujale's agents for the purpose of "bringing the people round to his way of thinking."[57]

In the same month riots erupted in Ijebu-Ode when a large throng of women carrying akoko leaves - a symbol of protest - marched through the town chanting: "the crown has fallen off your (the awujale's) head."[58] A demonstration such as this by women was seen as a very powerful form of symbolic protest. 1942 also saw the signing by 2,500 people of the Ijebu Monster Petition.[59] The main grievance contained in this petition was that the time honoured constitution of the Ijebu had been violated by the introduction of the "Sole Native Authority" system, a system that permitted Daniel Adesanya, the incumbent awujale, to rule in the manner of a dictator. And making skilful use of anti-German propaganda widespread in Nigeria at the time by turning it against the colonial administration the petition ended:

> "Not to listen to the people is to govern them in Nazi fashion."[60]

This opposition orchestrated by the oloritun proved to be extremely effective so much so that measures introduced by the colonial administration and for which the awujale was

responsible such as the collection of taxes and the registration of births, deaths and marriages could not be implemented. Although prepared to accept that these measures might be beneficial, the oloritun rejected them on the grounds that the method by which they were introduced:

> "violated the democratic character of the country."[61]

By 1949 this opposition had forced the awujale to agree to share power "with the people". However, it was not the traditionalists that benefitted most from this "return to democracy" but the western educated members of society who obtained a majority of the seats on the newly formed council that advised the ruler.

Muslims and the constitutional crisis

Although present in Ijebuland, as we saw in chapter two, since 1879, Islam did not become a major force there until the 1930s. Regarded at first as a religion of "foreign" slaves it began to gain in status and prestige as influential Ijebu such as the already mentioned chief Kuku, one time balogun (military commander) of Ijebu-Ode, converted with his entire household which numbered some two hundred people.

Moreover, although Muslim teachers came in time to acquire considerable authority in the local community, their advice being sought on many matters to do with religion, the law and taxation, the influence exercised by Muslims as a community in the early years of the new colonial society was minimal. The key to advancement in this society was, as already indicated, western education which until 1948 was almost entirely in Christian hands. Of the one hundred and two primary schools in Ijebu-Ode at this time, Christians were responsible for one hundred and Muslims for the other two, one of which was established

in 1930 with the encouragement and support of Muhammad Jumat Imam, the Mahdi-Messiah.[62]

Muslims could, of course, attend Christian schools but only on payment of a fee fifty per cent higher than that paid by Christians. And some of those who did attend "apostatised", including the future Anglican Archbishop of Ibadan, Samuel Odutola.[63] This, along with the desire to destroy the stereotype of the Muslim as "backward" led, as was shown in chapter two, to the establishment of the Ansar-Ud-Deen Society for the promotion of western education among Muslims by Muslims.

Nevertheless, the high cost of schooling, the fear of apostasy and the general lack of interest among most Muslims for western education explain why there were relatively few of them among the growing number of indigenous journalists, politicians, bankers, teachers, politicians and administrators. Muslims, however, were to give little thought to this until appointment of the Christian, Daniel Adesanya, as awujale in 1933, preoccupied for the most part with their own internal affairs. This appointment, however, galvanized them into action; they decided to enter the political arena to challenge the Christian ascendancy in Ijebuland which this appointment clearly marked.[64] But instead of bringing an already divided community together this foray into politics brought further disarray and disunity to the Muslims of Ijebuland.

Unlike the Christians who managed to keep the controversy over the awujale "out of Church" the Muslims, apart from the occasional display of solidarity, allowed it to divide them at every level. Or, perhaps more accurately, their response to the awujale reflected the deep division in their own community over the appointment of the chief imam of the Ijebu-Ode Central mosque, two factions competing to have their own candidate appointed. Eventually the dispute came to a head with the establishment of a second Central Mosque, under an alternative chief imam and a second Muslim public prayer ground.

On the question of the awujale, one of the factions, the smaller group, openly supported

him while the larger body publicly rejected him in the manner of the Traditionalists refusing, for example, to give to the king the symbolic recognition and the respect that was customary at the time of their annual festivals and that demonstrated their loyalty and acceptance of his authority. It was customary for Muslims on the occasion of the Greater Beiram festival on returning from the Id prayer ground where the festival was held to go as a community, led by their chief imam, to the awujale's palace to offer the king their respect and pledge to him their loyalty. However, on several occasions during the reign of Daniel Adesanya this visit was abandoned by the majority of Muslims as a public demonstration of their rejection of his authority, an action which greatly worried the colonial administration.

Other evidence of Muslim dissatisfaction and opposition to the awujale came when the tradition of the royal "capping" of the chief imam in the way the awujale "capped" a lesser chief, signifying royal approval of the appointment, was temporally abandoned by the larger of the two of the above mentioned Muslim factions.

For different reasons the sectarian Ahmadi movement which, as already mentioned, established a branch in Ijebu-Ode in the late 1920s, bitterly opposed the awujale accusing him of religious bias and discrimination. While the colonial government insisted in public on the principle of religious toleration it instructed the awujale to refuse the Ahmadis permission to build either a central mosque or an Id prayer ground in Ijebu-Ode on the grounds that this would lead to even greater strife and disunity among Muslims.[65] Once again, as with the orthodox Muslim community, opposition to the awujale failed to unite Ahmadis among themselves, as one branch led by a Nigerian Ahmadi split off from the main body which remained loyal to its Indian leadership.[66]

A further source of contention among Ijebu Muslims, and one which has already been referred to, was the presence of the Tijaniyya, Sufi, movement to which Muhammad Jumat Imam belonged for a short time. To many Ijebu Muslims this brotherhood practised what

they termed "devil worship" and "an entirely wrong religion."[67]

Ijebu Islam also witnessed the emergence of a group of Muslim clerics, many of them Sufis, who, like the Jakhanke and Mande clerics and the Tuareg Ineslemen discussed in chapter one, preached non-intervention in politics.[68] Of course, in the Ijebu context of the 1930s such advice, based as it now was on the argument that Muslims who took part in politics would be obliged to compromise their beliefs by associating with non-Muslim rulers, could easily be interpreted to mean opposition to the king, as could the scholars' condemnation of the traditional practice of prostration before the Chief, reminding their co-religionists that God alone was deserving of such respect and submission.

This scholarly, scriptural version of Islam created yet another Muslim category adding to the existing strains within the community and, thus, we see a Muslim community once loyal and accommodating to traditional authority, move into direct opposition in the 1930s over the question of the "Sole Native Authority" system as implemented by awujale Daniel Adesanya. Indeed, it was allegedly a Muslim who attempted to assassinate the king in 1934.[69]

Conclusion

It was pointed out earlier that in a traditional society such as pre-colonial Ijebuland change was accommodated and eventually absorbed by a symbolic device whereby the past was seen to validate the present, giving rise to the impression of society existing over against an unchanging temporal horizon, one age being interchangeable with another. For this to continue to be the case the traditional politico-religious order had to retain its plausibility and legitimacy. However, both were undermined by the colonial conquest, the subsequent introduction of the "Sole Native Authority" system, and by the rise of Christianity, and perhaps to a lesser degree Islam.

The "Sole Native Authority" system might, of course, have proved to be a force for unity in a much divided society. But, we have seen, although opposition was widespread, the

motives behind it varied. For the Traditionalists who opposed it this system symbolised the undermining of the "Old Order" and, with it, all that was worthwhile in terms of status, prestige, power, moral authority, family norms, diet, curative medicine, education, the calendar and so forth, and the imposition of a new, foreign dispensation.

For the mainly Christian, western-educated elite opposition was dictated in the shorter term by a concern to acquire influence and power and replace the Traditionalists as the representatives of the people and, in the longer term, with a view to preparing themselves for the leadership of the "New Africa" which would arrive after they had ousted the colonial regime.

Muslims for their part took an almost identical line to the Traditionalists. However, the community was not only deeply divided but, as it grew numerically stronger, it also became increasingly conscious of itself as a separate entity over against Christianity and the Traditional religion.

The "Sole Native Authority" system, therefore, made abundantly clear to the Ijebu the extent to which the traditional system of authority, both politico-religious and moral, had been challenged by colonialism and the evangelism of "foreign" missionaries. The outcome was an Ijebuland without leadership and direction, a society composed of strongly opposed and competing interest groups seeking to preserve or maintain or enhance their own value system, "style" of life and political and religious fortunes at the expense of the rest.

The crisis, moreover, not only left many bewildered and society in disarray but also had the effect of lifting the curtain on a melee of actors in search of a role. Among them was Muhammad Jumat Imam, the Mahdi-Messiah who, as will be seen in chapter five, attempted to act as reconciliator in this anomic scene by constructing for the Ijebu a new "mythological" basis, more in keeping with the changing times, on which they could rebuild

their unity and social identity. But first we must consider the path he took from reformer to prophet.

1. Ayantuga, "Ijebu and Its Neighbours 1851-1914", op. cit., (especially chaps 3,4 and 5). Also see: E. A. Ayandele, "Ideological Ferment in Ijebuland 1892-1943", in E. A. Ayandele, Nigerian Historical Studies, London: Frank Cass, 1977 pp. 270-296.

2. E. A. Ayandele, "Chieftaincy in Ijebuland 1892-1948: The Interaction of Religion and Politics", (paper presented at Makerere University, Kampala, Dec/Jan., 1969) p. 2.

3. T. J. H. Chappel, "The Yoruba Cult of Twins in Historical Perspective", in Africa, Vol. XLIV, July, 1974, No. 3 pp. 242-65. Also: Parrinder, West African Religion, op. cit., p. 99.

4. Ibid.

5. K. Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, Harmondsworth (Middlesex): Penguin Books, 1973, pp. 504-505. Also relevant to an understanding of the relationship between Tradition and change is: E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, (eds), Invention of Tradition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

6. A. Osuntokun, Nigeria in the First World War, London: Longman 1979.

7. Citation from an interview with an Archbishop of the Cherubim and Seraphim society at Ibadan, 26th July 1978.

8. P. B. Clarke, West Africans at War 1914-18 and 1939-45, London: Ethnographica, 1987, chap.VI, pp. 88 ff.

9. P. C. Lloyd, "Yoruba Myths: A Sociologist's Interpretation", in Odu (2), 1955, p. 21.

10. M. Fortes, The Dynamics of Clanship Among the Tallensi, London: Oxford University Press 1945 p. 23.

11. N. D. Fustel de Coulanges, The Ancient City: A Study of the Religion, Laws and Institutions of Greece and Rome, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980 pp. 132-33.

12. Citation from: Ayantuga, Ijebu and Its Neighbours, 1851-1914, op. cit., p. 35

13. N. Levtzion and J. Hopkins, Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 302.

14. Ayandele, "Chieftaincy in Ijebuland..", op. cit., pp.16 ff. See also: NAI. Ije-Prof 1/2197 Vol.J which contains the minutes of the meeting of the judicial council with the Resident at which the abidagba qualifications were formally abolished.

15. NAI. Ije-Prof 6/4J 186/1917.

16. E. Krapt-Askari, Yoruba Towns and Cities, **Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969. p. 39 and passim.**

17. P. C. Lloyd, "The Traditional Political System of the Yoruba" in Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, 10, 1954, p. 381.

18. E. A. Ayandele, "The Changing Position of the Awujales of Ijebuland under Colonial Rule", in M. Crowder and O. Ikime (eds) West African Chiefs, Ife: Ife University Press, 1970, p. 235.

19. There were, of course, disputes over which lineage was the royal lineage with the constitutional right to provide the awujale. One such dispute surrounded the selection of the controversial Daniel Adesanya from the allegedly defunct Gbelegbuwa house and increased the state of confusion and turmoil in Ijbu-Ode in the 1930s and 1940s. Cf: N.A.I.Ije-Prof 7/: Ijebu Monster Petition.

20. This line of argument is adopted by M. Gluckman: Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa, London: Cohen and West, 1963. p. 127.

21. M. Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, (edited with an introduction by T.Parsons) New York: The Free Press, 1947. p. 342.

22. Citation from Ayantuga, "Ijebu and its Neighbours 1851-1914", op. cit., p. 59.

23. Ibid. chap. II.

24. M. Crowder, West Africa Under Colonial Rule, London: Hutchinson 1968, p. 168

25. C. L. Temple, Native Races and Their Rulers: Sketches and Studies of Official Life and Administrative Problems in Nigeria, Cape Town: Argus, 1918, chap. 3. See also: Crowder, West Africa under Colonial Rule, op. cit., p. 167 and pp. 217-20.

26. Crowder, West Africa Under Colonial Rule, op. cit., p. 167.

27. Ibid. p. 213.

28. J. A. Atanda, "The Changing Status of the Alafin of Oyo under Colonial Rule and Independence", in Crowder and Ikime (eds), West African Chiefs, op. cit.

29. J. A. Atanda, The New Oyo Empire, London: Longman, 1973. Also: P. C. Lloyd, "Ijebu" in R. Le Marchand (ed), African Kingdoms in Perspective, London: Frank Cass, 1977.

30. The Times, 22nd, June, 1916.

31. Osuntokun, Nigeria in the First World War, op. cit., p 117.

32. M. Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization (edited with an introduction by T.Parsons) op. cit., pp. 324 ff. Also: R. Bendix, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait, London: Methuen, 1966.

33. Ibid. pp. 358 ff.

34. Ibid. pp. 341 ff.

35. NAI. Ije-Prof 1/ 774.(Handing over notes, administrative officers, Ijebu province).

36. NAI. Ije-Prof.7/2 (Reports on Native Officers).

37. K. Burridge, New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities op. cit., pp. 75-78 and passim.

38. NAI. Ije-Prof. 2C 17/13, Vol.I.

39. NAI. Ije-Prof. 7/2, op.cit.

40. E. O. Oyelade, "Trends in Hausa-Fulani Islam since Independence: Aspects of Islamic Modernism in Nigeria", Orita, XV (I) June, 1982, p. 8.

41. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Nuer Religion, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, (paperback edition), 1971 p. 292.

42. D. D. Laitin, Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 34 ff.

43. Ibid. p. 282

44. Ayandele, Chieftaincy in Ijebuland 1892-1948: The Interaction of Religion and Politics, op. cit., p. 9

45. Ibid. p. 10.

46. Ayandele, "Ideological Ferment in Ijebuland 1892-1943", op. cit., p. 275.

47. M. Bray, P. B. Clarke and D. Stevens, Education and Society in Africa, London: Edward Arnold, 1987.

48. Ayandele, "Ideological Ferment in Ijebuland, 1892-1943", op. cit., p.284

49. A. K. Bidmus, "Literary Appraisal of the Arabic Writings of the Yoruba Ulama", M. Phil. dissertation, University of Ibadan, 1972.

50. Ayandele, "Ideological Ferment in Ijebuland 1892-1943", op. cit., pp. 274 ff.

51. NAI. Ije-Prof 4. File No.I, J.1723. See also: the Nigerian Youth Movement newspaper The Daily Service, 24th July, 1942.

52. NAI. Daily Service, 4th August, 1942.

53. NAI. Daily Service, 3rd June, 1942 (This edition of the Daily Service carried the full text of the Reverend Odutola's address on the occasion of the jubilee of the Ijebu expedition).

54. Ibid.

55. Ayandele, "Ideological Ferment in Ijebuland, 1892-1943", op. cit., pp. 279 ff. Cf. also: Ayantuga, "Ijebu and its Neighbours 1851-1914", op.cit., chap. VIII.

56. NAI. Ije-Prof. 1/2179 Vol.I.

57. Ibid.

58. NAI. Daily Service, 12th October, 1942.

59. NAI. Ije-Prof. 7/4 contains the text of the Ijebu Monster Petition.

60. NAI. Daily Service, 16th May, 1945.

61. NAI. Ije-Prof. 1/2179, Vol.I.

62. NAI. Ije-Prof 1/2710.

63. Abdul, "Islam in Ijebu-Ode", op. cit.

64. Ibid.

65. NAI. Ije-Prof 1/ 2179.

66. H. J. Fisher, The Ahmadiyya: A Study in Contemporary Islam on The West African Coast, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963.

67. Interview material, Ijebu-Ode, 1976-78.

68. Bidmus, "A Literary Appraisal of the Arabic Writings of the Yoruba Ulama", op. cit.

69. Ayandele, "Ideological Ferment in Ijebuland 1892-1943", op. cit.

Chapter 4: From Reformer to Prophet.

Despite appearances to the contrary the charismatic leader is seldom a homo ex machina, one who suddenly and unexpectedly bursts on to the stage, as it were. Very often charismatic leaders are hard-working, highly persuasive, creative, dynamic individuals who are attentive to and carefully monitor the aspirations and the disappointments of the people. They may also plot and scheme their way to the top and even in part create the crisis they subsequently claim to have been sent to resolve thus turning millenarianism into a self-generating process.

There was both a creative, dynamic element and an element of careful planning in the rise of Muhammad Jumat Imam, as this present chapter will attempt to show as it traces the path taken by him from sober and well and widely respected reformer to that of an "eccentric" Mahdi-Messiah. Charismatic leaders are not, of course, entirely their own creation, indeed far from it. Society also determines who is charismatic and even the form and content of charisma, as was the case with Muhammad Jumat Imam, the Ijebu Mahdi-Messiah.

From the 1920s Muhammad Jumat Imam sought to project himself as a Muslim reformer and although he was no doubt sincere in his intention to purify Islam, with hindsight it becomes clear that this was done with a view to occupying the middle ground from where he could unite under his leadership Muslims and Christians, in a society torn apart by civil strife. He sensed that the existing political and religious leadership was incapable of uniting the Ijebu, and although he took no active part in the public manifestations of opposition to the awujale during the legitimacy crisis, discussed in chapter three, he occasionally made known his rejection of the latter's authority by symbolic gestures including the use of the royal umbrella, refusing to visit the Afin or royal palace to pay homage and respect to the king after the two principal Muslim festivals, Greater and Lesser Beiram, and by denouncing such practices as prostration in the presence of a ruler, the traditional sign of

obeisance and respect. Muhammad Jumat Imam had little respect either for the Muslim leadership which he dismissed on more that one occasion as backward and incompetent. Very largely a self-educated man Muhammad Jumat Imam's educational background was not dissimilar from that of many other African, and European, prophets. For example, the educational background of prophets of the Ethiopian and Zionist churches of Southern Africa ranged from no formal education at all to schooling to, on average, standard III or IV.[1] The Liberian prophet William Wade Harris who brought about a religious revolution in the Ivory Coast in a matter of few years in the early part of the present century also had little schooling.[2] Adventist prophets, and their followers, in England in the late eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century while hungry for knowledge, likewise had little formal education. Harrison writes of this period:

> "Although a majority of millenarians were not highly educated people, many of them seem to have had a thirst for knowledge and were in a real sense self-educated. In their autobiographies they refer to their efforts for educational self-improvement, and their personalities frequently display traits of auto-didacticism. There is a certain narrowness of outlook, a limitation of the imaginative qualities, and an unawareness of the true perspective of knowledge."[3]

Lack of schooling was not necessarily a handicap. On the contrary; it could serve to enhance the prophet's status as a spiritual leader. The Zulu prophet Isaiah Shembe (d.1935), founder of the Nazarite sect, said of himself:

> "If you had taught him in your schools, you would have had a chance of boasting over him. But God, in order to reveal his wisdom, sent this Shembe, who is a child, that he may speak as a wise and educated man."[4]

However, before discussing at length his educational and family background and his reformist ideas, we can first of all attempt to locate Muhammad Jumat Imam in that emerging tradition in Yorubaland of Muslim reforming clerics already referred to in chapter two and elsewhere in this study.

Types of Muslim Reformer

It was pointed out in chapter two that while the majority of Muslim scholars in Ijebuland

and indeed throughout Yorubaland were best categorised as accommodationists, the reformers could be roughly divided into conservatives and modernisers and although he does not fit easily into either of these categories Muhammad Jumat Imam came closer to the modernising tendency.[5] This can be seen from his efforts to build bridges between Islam and Christianity, Islam and western education, and Islam and nationalist politics, very largely conducted by the Christian educated elite. The one group for which he showed little tolerance and understanding were the Traditionalists who, as previously noted, were rapidly losing ground to their Christian and Muslim rivals.

However, to achieve his aims, Muhammad Jumat Imam believed it was first necessary to reform Islam, but not along the lines of the conservative reform movement.

Conservative Reform

By the 1930s the principal aim of the small body of Yoruba conservative reformers was to create out of the highly syncretistic version of Islam that had developed in Yorubaland a pure, unmixed form of the Muslim faith and practice with its own Yoruba, scholarly tradition.[6] There came from the pen of these reformers scholarly treatises on tawhid (God's unicity), fiqh, (jurisprudence), hadith (tradition) and ilm (education). A good deal of ink was also spilled on what might appear to be minor issues but were, nonetheless, crucial to orthodox Islam's self understanding and identity. For example, one treatise by a certain Muhammad Sanusi b. Salih, alias Alfa Alaka, is devoted to the correct positioning of the arms in ritual prayer, an issue that has frequently given rise to controversy among Muslims in Nigeria and throughout West Africa.

The Ahmadiyya movement, present in Lagos, Ijebu-Ode, Kano and elsewhere, insisted, following the Hanafite school of law, that arms should be folded across the chest, while the Maliki school of law followed by West African Muslims preferred that they be positioned by the person's sides. The verdict of the above mentioned scholar, Muhammad Sanusi, was that while neither position was contrary to Sunna, the practice of the prophet

Muhammad, the Maliki tradition should be followed by West African Muslims.

Unimportant to the casual observer, the position of arms at prayer has been the signal for numerous disturbances, even riots in Nigeria, between, for example, the Tijaniyya order and other Muslims, and in Ijebu-Ode it was one of the principal accusations lodged against this order by local Muslims who charged it with practicing "devil worship".[7]

The positioning of the arms at prayer was an essential part of what we might term the "phenomenon of telling" and/or "distinguishing" orthodox from heterodox believers in a Muslim community in ever-increasing contact with the writings of al-Suyuti, al-Maghili and the Sokoto jihadists, and also Salafi and Wahabi Muslim reformist ideas from the wider Muslim world.[8]

And the growing significance attached to the correct positioning of the Muslim's tomb can be similarly explained. Ahmad Mustafa b.Tijani, another Yoruba Muslim reformer of the conservative mould and, paradoxically, like many of the conservative reformers, a member of the Tijaniyya as his name indicates, argued in a short treatise against those Muslims who proposed that since it was the practice of the Traditionalists in Yorubaland to position their tombs level with the ground Muslims ought to raise theirs above ground level, otherwise they may appear to be imitating "pagan" practice. Ahmad Mustafa's verdict was that Muslims should not prohibit what Islam does not prohibit and that in fact Maliki law preferred the tradition of levelling tombs with the ground.[9]

On the burning issue of politics, one of the most distinguished of the conservative reformers, Alfa Oke-Koto, took the same strong line as many of the West African clerics discussed in chapter one, counselling Muslim scholars not to become involved in "un-islamic politics" on the grounds that they might be forced to make compromises inimical to their faith. He regarded Muslim participation in contemporary Yoruba politics as extremely unfortunate and pleaded with his co-religionists to discontinue this practice.[10]

The archetypal Muslim reforming cleric of the conservative type was Adam Abd Allah al-

Iluri who was exposed to Salafi reforming influence.[11] In his Al-Din an-Nasiba, Al-Iluri, very much in the manner of al-Maghili several centuries previously, traces all the problems of Nigerian Islam to the hypocrisy of the ulama and the ignorance of the people about their religion and calls for the reorganization of Islamic education as the first step in the reform of Islam. However, he does not support the idea of an integrated Muslim-Western curriculum but insists that Muslims be given a thorough grounding in Arabic and Islamic sciences. Among the "customs of paganism" which he condemned were divinatory practices, prostration before rulers, dignitaries and elders - a practice condemned, as previously noted, by Ibn Battuta in the Mali empire in the middle years of the fourteenth century - scarification and the use of traditional names bearing reference to the orisa or "pagan" gods. And along with other Muslim reformers on the conservative wing Al-Iluri also condemned the idea that Muslim women should be allowed to go about unveiled, a practice which, in his opinion ,was a clear proof that such women had adopted the attitudes of "emancipated western women".[12]

The increase in the number of local prophets and visionaries led Alfa Oke-Koto, already quoted, to advise people that:

> "belief in the prophets and messengers is divided into three: obligatory, absurdity(sic) and permitted."[13]

Belief is obligatory where the prophet or messenger is truthful, trust-worthy and a bearer of God's message, and absurd when people believe in a prophet or messenger who possesses the opposite qualities. "Permitted" belief means believing that all prophets or messengers of God are human beings except in so far as they are protected from committing sins and suffering from such diseases as deafness, blindness, dumbness, madness, leprosy and the like.[14]

Al-Iluri defines the prophet and the messenger as:

> " a person who receives revelation from God either through dreams while sleeping, or through inspiration put into his mind by the angel while awake, or through

> hearing the speech of God directly and without interpreter...The messenger is the prophet who receives the revelation from God and who is charged by God to deliver such revelation to the people."[15]

The difference between the prophet and the messenger, then, would seem to be that while both receive inspiration only the latter has the obligation to transmit it to the people. Al-Iluri listed the number of prophets at one hundred and twenty-four thousand and the number of messengers at three hundred and thirteen, and taken together only twenty five were mentioned in the Qur'an. Alfa Oke-Koto maintained that there were an uncountable number of both.

Leaving numerical discrepancies such as these to one side, the important point to note here is that prophecy was a subject of debate and discussion. Clearly, questions had been raised about the process whereby one becomes a prophet or messenger of God and the criteria for distinguishing a false from a true prophet or messenger. And, significantly, although neither of the above conservative reformers suggested that there could be new sources of prophetic revelation after Prophet Muhammad, they did not explicitly close off this possibility. As will be seen, Muhammad Jumat Imam was to construct his own answer to the question, based on Islamic exegesis and cultural nationalism, to affirm that the prophet Muhammad was not intended by God as the last of his genuine prophets.

We can now turn to a brief discussion of the modernising reform movement and the place of the future Mahdi-Messiah in that tradition.

<u>Modernising Reform</u>

There were a variety of sub-types of modernising reformers in Ijebu and Yorubaland as a whole during the period under review. Although the emphasis changed with the second generation of members from the 1950s - they being more inclined, in accordance with the prevailing spirit of nationalism, to adopt traditional dress among other things - the early Ansar-Ud-Deen society is perhaps the best example of a Muslim body in the pan-Yoruba setting that sought to give Islam a modern face in terms of education, manners, dress and

leisure pursuits. In Ijebu-Ode itself the Ijebu-Muslim Friendly Society provides the best local example of the same trend.

It should be noted, however, that the pioneering body in the attempt to create a synthesis out of Islamic and western education in Nigeria was the colonial administration in Lagos which was motivated in this by the belief that such a synthesis was necessary for "proper" development, by considerations of economy, since all colonies were meant to be self-supporting, and by the belief that, left entirely free to educate its own people and influenced by Sudanese Mahdism, Islam could become an ideological base for anti-colonial revolts.[16]

The colonial administration sponsored a number of integrated Christian-Muslim schools in Lagos, Epe and elsewhere from the 1890s.[17] Moreover, indigenous societies of Muslims such as the Egbe Kille were formed to introduce to Muslims western ideas and developments, including western education, which were not in conflict with Islamic principles. Further, the already mentioned and decidedly mission-oriented, unorthodox Ahmadiyya movement introduced a western curriculum into its schools both to enable Muslims to compete with Christians and to convert the latter to Islam.[18]

However, the Ansar-Ud-Deen society, founded in Lagos in 1923 as an educational society, was to become the largest and most successful modernising Muslim reform movement in western Nigeria. Sensitive to the stereotype of the Muslim as unsophisticated and backward, anxious to stop the haemorrhage Islam was experiencing as its better educated youth converted to Christianity, and with a view to producing a Muslim educated elite that would be able to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Christian educated elite, the society set about the establishment of schools with an integrated Islamic and western curriculum. And in time it came to enjoy remarkable success in this field founding some seven teacher training colleges, some fifty secondary and over one hundred primary schools.

This society also sought to give Islam a modern look in other ways so that its educated

members would not feel ill at ease, gauche and out of place in the emerging new society in which western, largely synonymous with Christian, fashions in dress, eating habits, rites of passage- particularly marriage- and leisure activities were, for the elite, symbolic of good breeding and high culture. The Ijebu Muslim Friendly Society founded in 1927 followed the same path for very much the same reasons. It modelled the Muslim rite of marriage on that of church weddings, sports such as tennis were encouraged and tea parties became the centre piece of receptions for dignitaries. For example, the report covering the work of the society during the first ten years of its existence lists the seven receptions given over that period and states:

> "the third of which was a Tea Party given in honour of alhaji Hussain Muhammad...for the reason (sic) of his pilgrimage."[19]

All was done:

> "To show young Muslims here in Nigeria who are still sceptic (sic) about Islam what Muslims are capable of doing if they would only unite."[20]

Regarding the adaptation of the marriage rite (nikah) an order of service was printed for the "Solemnization of Holy Matrimony (Nikah)" which contained the following format, an exact copy of the Christian rubrics: arrival of bride and bridegroom, prayer, sermon and declaration, joining and blessing, exhortation and benediction, signing of the marriage register and closing prayer.[21]

These modernising societies in order to compete with Christianity not only adapted the Christian form of marriage but also developed the Christian system of religious instruction for the young Muslim attending a Christian school by opening "Sunday" schools and printing qur'anic catechisms. Moreover, in contrast with the conservatives, many modernisers favoured the education of girls and opposed the veiling of women.

On the questions of the prevailing tendency among Muslim clerics to accommodate Islam to the Traditional religion and on the Traditional religion itself the modernising Muslim societies considered so far appear to have said very little, preoccupied as they were with

Muslim youth and the danger to it from Christianity. The Ahmadiyya movement was something of an exception in that it displayed a pronounced conservative bias on this issue and, overall, was much more hostile and aggressive towards Christianity, using every available means to persuade its young to convert to Islam.

There were, then, broadly speaking two types of Muslim reforming clerics in Yorubaland as Muhammad Jumat Imam set out on his own personal mission to reform Islam in Ijebu-Ode: one, conservative and/or oppositional, rejecting western education and insisting on a thoroughgoing education in the Islamic sciences, the other, modernising and/or integrationist, providing for Islam's youth the same educational and cultural opportunities afforded to young Christians and thereby eliminating one of the main reasons for "apostasy", Islam's embarrassingly unprogressive, negative image.

Muhammad Jumat Imam as modernising reformer

For a rounded understanding of Muhammad Jumat Imam's journey from reformer to Mahdi-Messiah it is necessary to consider both his public posture and activities and his private self, that self contained in his personal diary which reveals his inner thoughts, musings, fears, hopes and aspirations, all of which help to explain his bold, if not desperate, decision to proclaim himself the Mahdi-Messiah in January 1942.

However, since with most self-proclaimed prophets, messengers and renewers almost everything concerned with their history is used either to prove or disprove their claims, we will begin here with a brief outline of his family background, formative years and education, before going on to discuss his reform programme.

Background and education

Muhammad Jumat Imam took great pride in the fact that he was one of the first Ijebu Muslims to be born of Muslim parents. He was also said to be the first Muslim child in Ijebu-Ode to be named on the eighth day according to the Muslim rite, the usual practice being to follow tradition and name children on the seventh day after birth.[22] These two

events alone would have given him a certain standing in the Muslim community as would the fact that according to both his family and his followers Muhammad Jumat Imam was born on May 8th 1896, which was a Friday, and, therefore, a significant day for any would be Muslim shaykh claiming supernatural legitimation for, according to tradition, the model for all Muslim spiritual guides, the prophet Muhammad, was born on a Friday.

While all of this was propitious from the point of view of his role as a Muslim reformer and later as "proof" that he was divinely chosen to lead Nigerian Muslims into the millennium, Muhammad Jumat Imam's highly respectable family background would also have lent a certain authority to his claims. Those who knew him say that he came from a family of scholars, and one that was well respected in the town.[23] The term scholar as used here needs to be defined in terms of the local context: it should not be taken to mean someone who had achieved a high standard of learning in Arabic and the Islamic sciences - there were very few such people in Ijebu-Ode at this time. It was used rather of someone well versed in the Qur'an, who possessed a working knowledge of Arabic, a sound knowledge of the fundamentals of Islamic belief and practice, and of hadith or tradition. This, in the 1890s and early years of the twentieth century was sufficient to earn one a position of status and prestige among Muslims and non-Muslims alike where knowledge of literacy in Arabic, however basic, was a rare commodity. Moreover, a knowledge of Arabic, was also seen to give access to mystical knowledge and power since as the language of the Qur'an it was regarded as sacred.[24] Knowledge of the Bible and literacy in English conferred the same status and exercised the same fascination elsewhere, including the millenial milieu of Jamaica where, we are told, the ability to read, and the mere possession,even,of the Bible:

> "symbolised the prophet's access to realms of knowledge which had previously been the sole prerogative of the white man and increased the authority of their statements in the eyes of their followers."[25]

Muhammad Jumat Imam's father, Hassan Amoke-Oja, was a scholar in the sense just

outlined above. This is clear from a colonial government report on the family - compiled when it was feared the declaration of Mahdi-Messiahship might incense the Muslim community - which refers to him as a "learned man", that is one "who has a thorough knowledge of the Qur'an."[26] According to this same report Hassan Amoke-Oja was the son of Onafowo Kan Otubu, a well known Ijebu warrior chief. He converted to Islam in the 1880s and went on to become an alufa or Muslim teacher, a representative of the Tijaniyya brotherhood in Ijebu-Ode and an imam. Moreover, by the time Muhammad Jumat Imam was born his father, Hassan Amoke-Oja, was "one of the leading Muslims in Ijebu-Ode", and "very vocal and active and responsible for the conversion of many to Islam".[27]

Very little is known about Muhammad Jumat Imam's mother, Zainab Adeyofe, other than that she was the daughter of a chief of the royal house of Ile-Ife, something that the future Mahdi-Messiah laid great store by and was keen to emphasise. She also appears to have been a trader.[28]

Given the tradition that sons, and particularly the oldest son, followed in the footsteps of their father, it was no more than a matter of course that Muhammad Jumat Imam should become a mallam or Muslim teacher. Again like his father, and his mother, he was to work as a trader. He also dabbled in divination, fortune telling and astrology, all to earn a reasonable living for, although from a leading Muslim family and one that enjoyed considerable social status according to the traditional criteria for determining this, Muhammad Jumat Imam's family was not wealthy.

Returning to the question of Muhammad Jumat Imam's education his close followers insisted that he received no formal schooling. Asked how Muhammad Jumat Imam acquired his knowledge of Arabic and English, followers would claim that this was something miraculous, or that he received the gift of tongues from the "Spirit of Truth".[29] However, a possible explanation for this denial of any formal education may lie in the fact that it was part of a strategy to point up the similarities between their leader's background and

that of the prophet Muhammad whom, as several of the hadith or traditions referred to in chapter one showed, the Mahdi would resemble in a variety of ways. Therefore, although followers may not have been fully conversant with the body of tradition relating to the Mahdi they were, doubtless, aware that the more their leader's life could be shown to resemble that of the prophet Muhammad, who also, according to tradition, received no formal education, the more proof they had of the authenticity of his claims.

However, their insistence to the contrary notwithstanding, there is evidence to suggest that this Ijebu Muslim reformer did have some formal training in Arabic for the colonial government report referred to above states that:

> "Muhammad Jumat Imam received his education in Arabic language under the tuition of his father and mallams Popoola and Jirigisu of Ilorin."[30]

Ilorin to the north of Ijebu-Ode was the main centre for Islamic learning for the Muslim Yoruba and many of its mallams travelled south to Ijebu and from there to Lagos.[31]

But whatever formal education he may have had, Muhammad Jumat Imam, like so many prophets and charismatic leaders, was very much a self-taught man whose work in the local book trade enabled him to built up what was a relatively large library. He also wrote a number of small treatises, including a work on tawhid (God's unicity), which continue to be used by present day Ijebu Mahdists and even in non-mahdists circles.

Kano and Mecca.

In 1918 Muhammad Jumat Imam travelled to northern Nigeria to the old Muslim city of Kano, a strong centre of Sudanese and Nigerian Mahdism and also a stronghold of the Tijaniyya.[32] He worked there as a tafsir mallam - a scholar recognised by the local Muslim community as a legitimate interpreter of the Qur'an - and as a trader, principally among the immigrant Yoruba in the Kofa Mata ward of the city, until 1922, the year of his father's death. While in Kano he joined the Tijaniyya Sufi order which was doubtless one of the principal sources of his millenarian ideas generally and of his notions regarding his

special, prophetic role, the Ahmadiyya and aladura movements, as we have already noted, being others.

The resemblance between the claims made by Muhammad Jumat Imam and those of the founder of the Tijaniyya will be more apparent in the next chapter meanwhile it can be noted here that Shaykh al-Tijani, on the basis of dreams and instructions from the prophet Muhammad, believed he had been selected for a special role in the history of Sufism. He not only believed that he had been chosen to be the "seal" of the Sufi saints, but also that his mystical order was superior to all other Sufi paths, and indeed offered what was virtually a cast-iron guarantee of salvation to all who joined it, and damnation to all who withdrew. But perhaps even more important in determining the future path of Muhammad Jumat Imam was the widely held view among Tijani members in Kano that Shaykh al-Tijani had foretold that the Mahdi would come from the Tijaniyya.[33]

After his return to Ijebu-Ode from Kano in 1922 for his father's funeral the next important event in Muhammad Jumat Imam's life and one that was to increase his standing in the Muslim community in Ijebu-Ode was his pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca in 1926. By the 1920s only very few Muslims from Ijebuland or indeed from southern Nigeria had performed the hajj. For the year 1918 some twenty pilgrims only are reported to have left southern Nigeria for Mecca.[34] The reasons for this were many, including poor communications and lack of resources, and Muhammad Jumat Imam must, therefore, have been considerably better off than many of his fellow Muslims since he was able to afford to travel by boat from Lagos to Saudi Arabia. In the majority of cases resources were so scarce, by comparison, that pilgrims had to work while en route to pay for the journey, many of them on the Gezira cotton plantations in the Sudan. For such people the pilgrimage could take as long as ten years to complete.

The pilgrimage to Mecca often had the effect of radicalizing those who had undertaken it, leaving them much more critical of local Islam and in particular its tendency to

accommodate to traditional beliefs and practices, and Muhammad Jumat Imam was no exception. On his return to Ijebu-Ode in 1927 he founded the Society of Al-Hajjis which was composed of the select few Ijebu Muslims who had made the hajj and were thus entitled to be addressed as al-hajj, the pilgrim.

Muhammad Jumat Imam's reformist ideas

The future Mahdi-Messiah's reforming zeal was already evident in his opening address to the Society of Al-Hajjis in which he condemned the poor organization of Islam in Ijebuland, its lack of able and competent leaders, its "mixing" tendencies and its rejection of western education which, above all else, accounted for its failure to have anything like the same influence in the wider society as Christianity.[35]

Muhammad Jumat Imam, fully aware that literacy ruled in colonial Ijebuland, set out to explain to his fellow Muslims that there was no incompatibility between Islam and western education, and Islam and science and technology, and it was only ignorance of Islam that led people to believe there could be. From 1927 he worked continuously to change the negative image of Islam in Ijebuland where Muslims, as we have seen, were considered in western-educated and Christian circles as illiterate and unsophisticated, in local parlance "bush". His strategy was to provide his co-religionists with a sound education in the Qur'an and hadith, tradition, in order to demonstrate that Islam encouraged learning wherever it was to be found.

Muhammad Jumat Imam was fully aware, also, of the strong resistance among Ijebu Muslims to western education, a resistance which the headmaster of the Ijebu Muslim school, situated near the home of the reformer, lamented and attributed in part to the relatively high cost of the schooling:

> "We are ignorant of the value of modern education and rightly or wrongly Muslims remain unwilling to send their children to school. The very few Muslims who have sent their children to mission schools have to pay a fee that is fifty per cent higher than that paid by Christians. Moreover, at the advent of western education several Muslim parents allowed their children to go to these schools to the disadvantage of

the present day Muslim youth."[36]

Also, as previously noted, in the Muslim mind western education and Christianity were synonymous giving rise to a fear among Muslim parents that their children would be pressurised into becoming Christians if they attended Christian schools. Well known local examples were the previously mentioned conversion of the future Anglican Archbishop of Ibadan, Samuel Odutola, of his brother, the wealthy Ijebu business man and member of the Nigerian Youth Movement, Timothy Odutola, and of J. W. Osilaya, proprietor of the Ife Printing Press in Lagos.[37] Many traditionalists likewise opposed western education, parents being afraid, as Samuel Ajayi Crowther the Anglican bishop of the Niger Delta Pastorate discovered, that by allowing their children to go to the mission run school they would not only "lose" them to another culture but would also incur the displeasure of those gods to whom their offspring had been dedicated.[38]

Such resistance, common elsewhere in south-western Nigeria and indeed in much of Muslim West Africa,[39] was, of course, due to more than high fees, Christian proselytism and fear of the wrath of the traditional gods. Western education, even when provided in an Islamic context, was tantamount to initiation into another culture for not only was the school the most overt manifestation of modernity but it also challenged many of the assumptions on which the day to day family and community life of the Ijebu were based. And by providing the young with access to new knowledge that their parents did not have, it increased inter-generational conflict while at the same time weakening the authority exercised by parents over their children. Questioning school children about what they had been taught by one of his European colleagues, the above mentioned Nigerian bishop, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, declared himself to be:

> "truly gratified to hear from each boy a simple statement of the discourses of the day and, with a tone of conviction of the folly of idol worship, they related parts of the discourses which referred to the folly of their parents (my emphasis)."[40]

This system of education, in which the Yoruba language was the medium of instruction,

by undermining the wisdom of parental ways and more generally of that of the more senior members of society, struck at the very foundations on which the local culture and traditions of society rested. Parents were no longer the role models as the young western educated, both Muslim and Christian, turned away from traditional occupations and lifestyles in pursuit of other, more prestigious employment and a more modern way of life. And, it may be noted, the results appear to have been at times disastrous, as the following extract from the Yoruba News for September 1929 suggests:

> "Education in Nigeria in the last twenty years has come to naught. It has been an increasing source of prolific afflictions and poverty among the younger generation. Many formerly employed are now unemployed. . .a man who was eating from the table before is now eating from a leaf. The number of applicants seeking work at the Tribune office on the fifteenth of September (1929) was four hundred and fifty and only six were engaged. In olden times we see that there was employment suiting all abilities and desires in the world. But what happens now we do not know. From many instances we see that our fathers were not europeanised and could carry out their responsibilities. But education has rendered us indolent so that we do not seem fit or capable for any other work (sic)."[41]

According to Dr Asuni, a scholar with more than thirty years experience treating patients at a psychiatric clinic in Abeokuta, it was this kind of disillusionment that led many to join millenarian and apocalyptic type movements.[42]

Muhammad Jumat Imam was something of an exception to the general practice among those with a western education for, although he had mastered the skills necessary for success in the new order, he remained deeply attached to his social and cultural background and upbringing. He continued, for example, to wear traditional dress and to shun the path to high status, through wealth, by living in the one story house - two stories was a clear, if not the clearest, sign of success in the new order - in which he was born.[43] And he not only appeared to be unconcerned with success in the new, colonial-inspired world and with the material rewards it could bring, but also seemed to show little if any concern for political advancement, taking no direct part in the politics of opposition fuelled by the constitutional crisis discussed in chapter three, continuing instead to teach in the Muslim

school which he had helped to found.

Muhammad Jumat Imam was not, however, a self-effacing man, or one without ambition. As already mentioned, he symbolically rejected the king's authority and in numerous ways let it be known publicly - by for example, the use of the royal umbrella - that he was to be regarded as a person of some considerable status and importance in the community. Moreover, Muhammad Jumat Imam continually re-appraised the rapidly changing situation in Ijebu-Ode, widened the range of his contacts in search of greater support for his reforms, while at the same time enlarging the scope of his reform programme.

By the 1930s his following was already considerable, particularly among those Ijebu Muslims who, while desirous of western education and the reform of Islam, at the same time sought to preserve the fundamentals of their Muslim and Ijebu identity and way of life. Although Muslims of this disposition were his immediate concern and largest constituency, the future Mahdi-Messiah intended that his support should go beyond these limits and embrace all his fellow Ijebu, and all Yoruba Muslims and Christians.

Muhammad Jumat Imam promised to assist all Yoruba Christians and Muslims to better themselves. This much is evident from his inaugural address to the Islamic Reform Society which, as we have seen, he was instrumental in helping to establish. He encouraged the members to join with anyone, whether Muslim or Christian, in the task of improving the education of the people of Western Nigeria.[44] Moreover, he had already begun to see himself not only as a Muslim-Christian leader but also as the spokesman for the all Yoruba and even for the black race.

This ecumenical, pan-Yoruba and pan-Africanist strategy was to single him out for attention and praise from many quarters including the Nigerian Youth Movement and his response was to give black nationalism a more prominent place in his teaching. He spoke of the black race's right to its own prophet and began to predict the end of colonialism. For its part the Nigerian Youth Movement on numerous occasions dedicated several columns in

its influential and widely read newspaper the Daily Service to a discussion of Muhammad Jumat Imam's "constructive ideas for the progress of Nigeria".[45] However, he tended to divide as well as unite, making use of the Islamic Reform Society to express his opinions about the quality of the Muslim leadership in Ijebu-Ode and, as already noted, stressing that a leader should be someone of learning in both the Islamic and western tradition, a qualification that neither of the leading contenders for the vacant position of chief imam possessed.[46]

This and other only partially veiled references to the unsuitability of the existing Muslim leadership prompted some of his co-religionists to ask if Muhammad Jumat Imam's principal goal was not to have himself appointed chief imam, a suspicion that was not without foundation. However, the radical nature of some of his reform proposals such as those relating to the use of Yoruba in the liturgy made such an appointment extremely unlikely. Although he emphasised the importance of learning Arabic and had himself achieved a relatively high standard in both the writing and speaking of this language, Muhammad Jumat Imam, nevertheless, broke with convention in Ijebu-Ode by introducing Yoruba into the khutbah or sermon given by the imam during the Friday service, and into the marriage and other rites. Such a practice continues to meet with strong opposition from many Muslims in Ijebuland.

Even more controversial were his views on the education of Muslim women and their participation in the life of the Muslim community and on Muslim-Christian relations. The response of the conservative and modernising Muslim scholar to the question of the education and general conduct of Muslim women was touched on above. Muhammad Jumat Imam was to reject outright the position of the former and go beyond that of the latter. At weekend gatherings held in his home in Idepo Street in the centre of Ijebu-Ode Muhammad Jumat Imam discussed his reforms and methods for implementing them with members of the Islamic Reform Society, students and admirers. He spoke of his wish to

rid Ijebu Islam of its many traces of "pagan" practice, of the use and abuse of alcohol by Muslims and stressed that this could only be done by providing all Muslims, male and female, with a sound education.

Contrary to the widely held popular view that education, whether Islamic or western, was only for men Muhammad Jumat Imam insisted that Muslim parents should be encouraged to send their daughters to school to learn the Qur'an, Arabic and the three "Rs". He also wanted provision made for the teaching of the parents themselves, especially mothers, and began classes for Muslim women in his own home. Moreover, he rejected the view current in Muslim circles that women should not be allowed to worship side by side with men in the same mosque, arguing that this was contrary to Islamic teaching. And to show his determination to end such discrimination he actively encouraged women to join men for prayer and other Muslim rituals in his own mosque in Idepo Street.

Many women welcomed this opportunity and in future years when others abandoned Muhammad Jumat Imam after he had made his claim to be the Mahdi-Messiah they were to remain among his most loyal supporters and were rewarded with positions of responsibility in the Mahdiyya movement. Indeed, this movement, albeit on a much smaller scale, became for Muslim women in Ijebu the counterpart of the aladura (praying) churches which held such great appeal for Yoruba women, and in particular for Ijebu women.[47]

The support for Muhammad Jumat Imam from Muslim women did not come solely as a result of his promoting their interests in this way. By insisting on their being educated, by encouraging their active participation in their faith and by giving them positions of responsibility in the Muslim community, Muhammad Jumat Imam was not only countering an incorrect interpretation of Islam and receiving support for this, but was also restoring to Muslim women rights which they traditionally enjoyed but were wrongly denied in the name of orthodoxy by Ijebu Muslim leaders who, ironically, while condemning this reformer's "dangerous" opinions, practised what was a highly syncretistic version of Islam.

While no Muslim at this time, the late 1930s, charged him with heresy - indeed many Muslims continued to hold him in high regard on account of his scholarship and knowledge - with hindsight it is clear that Muhammad Jumat Imam had already laid the foundations of a separate Muslim community with its own identity; the reforms he had introduced made for a sharp contrast between the outlook, attitudes and practices of members of his Islamic Reform Society and other Muslims in Ijebu-Ode.

However, what more than anything else was to set this community apart were its views on the Bible and Christianity. Although equally sound from an orthodox Muslim perspective, these views proved to be just as controversial among Ijebu Muslims as Muhammad Jumat Imam's teachings on Muslim women. Now disaffected and alienated from the Muslim leadership and seeing himself increasingly as a leader of all "civilised" Ijebu, he sought to build bridges between Muslims of his own persuasion and Christians, in particular the Christians of the aladura (prayer) churches.

This was the truly novel element in the Ijebu Muslim context of the reformer's modernising reform programme and for this reason and for the light it throws on indigenous Christian influence on his ideas concerning his own prophetic mission, it merits separate treatment here.

<u>The reformer and the Bible and Christianity.</u>

With one or two notable exceptions Muslims in western Nigeria when they did decide to study the Bible did so for apologetic reasons. And it was often for precisely the same reason that Christians studied the Qur'an. Arabic bibles were produced for distribution among Muslims and Arabic-speaking clergymen such as the Fourah Bay graduate Mr Schapira arrived in Nigeria in the 1870s to counter Islamic expansion. Mr Schapira later spoke of the success he enjoyed among Muslims by proving that Muhammad's "revelations" were taken from Judaeo-Christian sources.[48]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Christian missionary attitude to Islam was

"positivistic"; while it regarded the Muslim faith as a higher religion than paganism it was viewed as being greatly inferior to Christianity. This was not only true of Bishop Crowther and his co-workers in the Niger Delta, but throughout West Africa, particularly in former French West Africa.[49] Muslim clerics, for their part, cited passages from the Old and New Testaments as testimony that God had foretold the advent of Prophet Muhammad or in defence of the Muslim interpretation of the death of Jesus.[50] Only rarely was controversy put aside in favour of positive and constructive comment.

Among the exceptions on the Christian side were the Nigerian Baptist Mojola Agbebi who spoke in Lagos in the late nineteenth century of Islam as Christianity's "older brother" in the sub-Saharan African context, and the West Indian Edward Wilmot Blyden who wrote of Muslims as "our co-religionists".[51] Blyden also played a prominent part in the attempt in the 1890s in Lagos to establish schools with an integrated Christian/ Western-Muslim curriculum.

The motives behind such ecumenical gestures as these were complex. Both Agbebi and Blyden regarded Islam as being tolerant and non-racialist. To these cultural nationalists it also had the merit of not being the religion of the colonising power. Moreover, it appeared to blend in much more easily than Christianity with African custom and tradition and almost all its carriers were African. It was also seen as a genuinely civilising force with its own long and in part glorious history and tradition of learning. However, in singling out Islam's positive aspects these Christian evangelists did not regard themselves as being in any way disloyal to their own faith for their aim, they stressed, was not to encourage the spread of Islam but to inspire Christianity to become more African after the manner of its great rival.[52]

As already indicated, where Christianity and Islam encountered each other the general tendency was for one side to study the other in order to score points in public debate or for purposes of conversion. In Ijebu-Ode this was especially true of Ahmadiyya

missionaries on the Muslim side, and on the Christian side of the Watch Tower movement. By contrast Muhammad Jumat Imam stressed the fundamental importance for Muslims of learning to appreciate and understand both the Bible and the Qur'an, not for polemical purposes but, as he told his students:

> "because both books have been passed down to men from the one God and so we (Muslims) must worship the Bible, for God is one and there is no division in Him (sic)."[53]

There was another important reason why Muslims should place the Bible on an equal footing with the Qur'an, a reason that reflected the mounting tension in Ijebu society discussed in the previous chapter: it would lead to closer co-operation between Muslims and Christians in Ijebu-Ode and prevent further disunity. As a member of the Islamic Reform Society expressed it:

> " Before Muhammad Jumat Imam's reforms most of us Muslims did not believe in the Bible and in those days Christians and Muslims were not working together. But he gave us reasons why we must believe in both the Bible and the Qur'an."[54]

According to an another of the reformer's disciples:

> "Muhammad Jumat Imam taught us to follow one way to Allah and to accept both holy books and that those who do not believe in the Bible are not true believers."[55]

The Muslim reformer even went as far as to explain to his followers that both Christianity and Islam preached the same thing: faith in one God and in Jesus, son of Mary. In the words of an informant:

> "He taught us that if a Muslim hates a Christian he is not a Muslim and if a Christian hates a Muslim he is not a Christian. Muslims hated him because of this, because he wanted the two religions to become one. So in our prayers we pray (sic) Our Father- we do not say Our Father but God- who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, they kingdom come. This we used to say every day. We still say it to day."[56]

However, on the question of Jesus he held fast to the Muslim interpretation that he was not the son of God for, he explained:

> " Even Jesus Christ in St.John's Gospel chapter one told his followers there was only one God and that he himself was not God."[57]

Jesus was certainly from God but to make out that he was God was simply a way of elevating him to a status higher than that of other prophets including Moses and Muhammad. As to prophet Muhammad the reformer criticised Muslims for their tendency to "deify" him in the way Christians deified Jesus. Both, though protected from error, were only human beings.

Despite his pronouncements on Muslim-Christian relations which generated a great deal of opposition from the Muslim establishment Muhammad Jumat Imam was, nevertheless, still regarded as orthodox. However, it is clear from his private papers that he had begun to accept the possibility that there could be a genuinely prophetic ministry after Muhammad and it was over this issue that many of his most devoted and loyal supporters of his reform programme were to part company with him. His thinking on this matter was influenced by his relations with the Ahmadiyya movement. This movement, as is well known, believes its founder, Ghulam Ahmad, to be the Mahdi-Messiah, and it is clearly from this source that Muhammad Jumat Imam took his own title. His contacts with the movement in Lagos and Ijebu were friendly and according to Ahmadi accounts he had at one time considered joining the movement on condition that he be appointed the leader of its Ijebu branch. Once again, as in the case of his failure to be appointed the Imam of the Ijebu Central mosque, his failure to become the imam of the Ijebu Ahmadis was responsible, it is explained, for his decision to proclaim himself the Mahdi-Messiah.[58] While there is some truth in this it is also the case that he differed markedly from Ahmadi missionaries, and for that matter from the traditional Muslim cleric, in rising above confrontation and apologetics to emphasise the truths common to both Muslims and Christians. This pursuit of common ground in a society divided along religious, cultural, economic, educational and political lines may have been just as important an element in his decision to proclaim himself the Mahdi-Messiah as thwarted ambition and wounded pride.

A further crucial influence on the thinking of Muhammad Jumat Imam concerning prophesy was the previously mentioned aladura movement which began close to the future Mahdi-Messiah's house in Ijebu-Ode at the end of World War I.[59]

Aladura influence on the reformer

The Ijebu Muslim reformer not only lived within a few hundred yards of Pastor Shadare, founder of the Precious Stone society and one of the two or three principal forerunners of the aladura movement, but according to the latter's son:

"Muhammad Jumat Imam and my father preached the same thing."[60]

While this was something of an exaggeration Muhammad Jumat Imam, nevertheless, owed much to Shadare and frequently consulted the pastor on many matters including his decision to proclaim himself the Mahdi-Messiah. On this last issue he apparently met with,"a very positive response".[61] Moreover, not only was the Muslim reformer's second wife, later to be appointed Shaikha Mahdi, a cousin of a prominent member of the Faith Tabernacle movement, but also several members from this group and from the already mentioned Christ Apostolic church, were to join the Mahdiyya movement when it was formally launched in December 1941.

This was not, it should be said, a straight forward conversion to Islam for all concerned, but for several a matter of reconversion. While a certain Mrs Onigaret, leader of the womens' section of the Christ Apostolic church had always been a Christian, as had some of the other women whom she brought with her into the Mahdiyya movement, others had once before been Muslims but had "converted" to Christianity during their school days and were now returning to an "integrated" Muslim-Christian faith which fitted well with their religious history. For this, among other reasons, the exchanges between church and mosque created little tension. And, as will be seen below, and in a later chapter, there was to be continuous interaction at every level, including belief and practice, between the Mahdiyya and the aladura churches.

Some mention has already been made of the fact that prayer and faith in its efficacy are the core of aladura belief and practice and these are often seen as leading directly to other religious experiences such as "supernaturally" triggered dreams and visions, which, it will be shown, were crucial in establishing the legitimacy of Muhammad Jumat Imam's claim to be the Mahdi-Messiah. Moreover, among the aladura churches healing was believed to depend on faith and prayer and not on medicines whether traditional or western.

Muhammad Jumat Imam, influenced by what he had seen in the aladura churches which he occasionally frequented and by what he had learned in his discussions with their prophets, likewise laid great emphasis on the power and efficacy of faith and prayer, thus, making the passage between aladura church and Islam a relatively smooth one.

For example, he offered the following gospel-inspired counsel to his followers:

> "whatever you ask for and pray for believe and you shall receive it."[62]

Again faith, the Muslim reformer told his disciples:

> " should always appear in your every thought, word and deed. He who has faith is one with God and therefore to have faith is to be in that power that can do all things."[63]

And on the same subject he quoted the passage from James 2v20:

> "Do you realise you senseless man that faith without good works is useless." [64]

Regarding Muhammad Jumat Imam's use of James's epistle and aladura influence on his thinking, it is worth recalling here Turner's observation that this letter was the "most used book" among the aladura.[65]

Muhammad Jumat Imam told his listeners that faith was essential to their emotional and psychological well being; it was a source of strength, self confidence and power that when exercised drove away all, doubt, fear and anxiety.[66] On prayer, he stressed that whether it were offered by a Muslim or Christian, if made in faith, it would be efficacious, and in keeping with what he preached, Muhammad Jumat Imam visited prophet Olagbami, the one time pastor of the Christ Apostolic Church, Ijebu-Ode, to ask for his prayers.

Revelation through dreams and visions also assumed a prominent place in the religious activities at Muhammad Jumat Imam's Idepo Street mosque and, as with prayer, he would seek out aladura prophets to interpret his own dreams and visions. Although the importance Muhammad Jumat Imam attached to dreams and visions was doubtless due in part to aladura influence he was also acting very much in keeping with his own religious tradition; Muslim oneirology is as old as Islam itself. Moreover, he was well acquainted with certain Muslim traditions regarding dreams and visions such as the one to the effect that if the Prophet Muhammad himself appears in a dream, that dream must be true.[67]

He was also in no doubt about the role of the ancestor in dream interpretation, a role that resembled closely that of the Prophet. As Fisher remarked:

> " The role of the Prophet in resolving knotty problems through dreams appearances is very like. . .the role of the ancestors in some of the dreams of traditional Africa."[68]

In many parts of black Africa the dead may return in dreams to deplore some offence against custom, or to bemoan some neglect of traditional duty. Indeed, the ancestors may even be implored to send a message in a dream to warn against such things.

It was to the previously mentioned aladura prophet, Olagbami, that Muhammad Jumat Imam took his dream concerning his own role as a prophet. Olagbami recalled interpreting the dream:

> "I revealed to Muhammad Jumat Imam on December 31st 1941 that a great power would descend upon him and that he would be a great teacher with many followers. I told him that the Lord would advise him to go and fast for seven days if he truly desired to be the recipient of this power. This he did and on January 2nd 1942 he appeared for the first time in public holding the Qur'an in one hand and the Bible in the other. I prayed for the Mahdi and interpreted his dream. That is how the movement (the Mahdiyya) started."[69]

In requesting prophet Olagbami to interpret his dreams Muhammad Jumat Imam was clearly seeking recognition for his mission from a Christian source in order that he might justifiably claim to be the Messiah of the Christians, while other dreams interpreted by Muslim clerics were to be made to serve to legitimate his call to be the God-guided one

or Mahdi of the Muslims.

Nevertheless, one might have expected that the extent of aladura influence on Muhammad Jumat Imam would have destroyed his credibility as a Muslim reformer. This was not, however, the case for it was not always easy to separate out what was Muslim from what was aladura and the converse was also true. Fisher and Peel, for example, have shown that there was considerable Islamic influence on the aladura movement, an influence that can be seen even in its very name aladura which is ultimately derived from the Arabic "dura" meaning intercessory prayer, and in such aladura terms as "wole", prophet, from the Arabic wali or saint.[70] Moreover, the sacred script, which incidentally was never developed, of the Church of the Lord, aladura, was said to have come from a vision of a book:

"Open, written in a strange Arabic language."[71]

There were also certain similarities in the prayer ritual between Aladura and Muslims; as Peel observed, the members of the aladura church of the Cherubim and Seraphim,"bow right down to pray in Muslim fashion."[72] Furthermore, the uses of prayer are often the same, both Muslims and Aladuras seeing in it not only a means of healing but also a defence against potential enemies and dangers. Again Aladuras, like Muslims, insist on regular prayer and in the case of the Church of the Lord this should be every three hours during twenty four. And in the Aladura movement, as in Islam, there is an obligation to fast and to abstain from alcohol, tobacco and pork. Likewise, menstruating women, and shoes, are excluded from both church and mosque. And an even more arresting parallel is the similarity between the aladura position and that of the Muslims both on the mission of Jesus in relation to the Old Testament and the subsequent decline of Christianity. The Church of the Lord, aladura, for example, holds the view that it represents the true religion of Abraham, Moses and David before it degenerated to the corrupt state in which Jesus found it. He then restored it only for it to decline once again, a position very close to Islam's view of Old and New Testament history and of its own role in restoring and

preserving the true word of God.

Muslim-Aladura parallels can also be found in social procedures such as keeping dowry and the marriage expenses in the reach of all, and at funerals in the barring of the corpse from the mosque or church. Out of respect for Muslims in all of this the Aladura refer to Muslim worship as "clean", and this by comparison with Traditional religious practice and even the ritual activity of some of the independent African churches. Again polygamy is a point of comparison between the two, the Archbishop of one aladura church informing this researcher that it was the only reason why he left the Anglican church. This same cleric, moreover, made the rather unusual if not astonishing comment that there was no divide between Muslims and Christians on the question of Jesus. He insisted that Muslims in fact held Jesus in higher esteem than Christians for, as he explained:

> "We Christians speak of Jesus as the son of God and that is a biological understanding of him whereas Muslims speak of him as ruh al-Allah, the Spirit of God, and that is a spiritual understanding which is higher than ours".[73]

Importantly for this study the aladura churches, as noted in chapter two, and local Islam also shared in common a strong belief in the millennium. Peel refers to the importance of millenarianism among the Aladura and comments that one of the main inspirations behind the establishment of the already mentioned Faith Tabernacle movement in Ijebu-Ode and largely responsible for its doctrinal and liturgical direction, a certain pastor Clark, from Philadelphia:

> "was always looking for signs of the Second Coming, and in one letter said Mussolini needs watching as a possible Antichrist. . ."[74]

For Muhammad Jumat Imam the Antichrist or dajjal was Hitler, a much more familiar figure in Nigeria on account of the intense anti-Nazi propaganda put out by the colonial government. Even farmers in the most remote villages had heard of the dictator as had virtually every school child.[75]

Returning to the question of aladura adventism Peel adds:

" an official millennialism has remained a feature of the aladura movement.."[76]

Evidence of this can be found in, among other places, the preaching and writings of the Ijebu-Ode born David Ogunleye Odubanjo, a one time Muslim who was to convert to Christianity and play a leading role in the development of the Faith Tabernacle movement in Ijebuland and Lagos from the early 1920s. It was Odubanjo who was largely responsible for forging the link, already mentioned in chapter two, between the Faith Tabernacle movement of Philadelphia and the Diamond Society of St. Saviour's Anglican Church, Ijebu-Ode, founded by the already mentioned pastor Shadare and Miss Sophia Odunlami. Throughout his ministry in the aladura movement Odubanjo frequently preached and wrote about the Second Coming. In 1946 he remarked on how the newspapers:

> "are daily speaking of the present time as a period of the new world in the making and of the old world falling to pieces;"[77]

Odubanjo agreed in general with this interpretation of events and to convey something of the millenarian hopes and dreams which he shared with others we can quote a somewhat lengthy passage from his sermon, "The End is Coming Soon":

> " all this is confirmed by the Word of God. . .the judgment seat of Christ is not far distant. The golden age approaches fast. . .Earth's long night of weeping will soon be ended and the King will be here. This present age will soon give way to the next, the golden age of the Millennium. This age is ending with a rapidity that is startling. . .we are in the rapids of time. . .there is a momentum which is sweeping the whole world into a climax. Slowness is the characteristic of the beginning of an age and rapidity of its end. The Bible is the key to present day happenings. It shows us just where we are on the river of time. No clearer presentation of the End of Time is given anywhere than in Matthew 24. . .the greatest war in history has just taken place, the greatest earthquake (sic) in all history, the terrible upheaval in Japan has just taken place, and the greatest famine in Germany and other European countries has just taken place and all of this in an intensified form and within the same decade so that we might rightly look upon it as the sign that we are at the End of Time."[78]

Thus, although rarely if ever made explicit as Christianity and Islam increasingly competed with each other, fishing in the same pool for the steadily diminishing number of traditionalists, there existed at virtually every level, including that of a strongly held belief

in the millennium, striking parallels between Muslims and aladura Christians. This in itself made it possible for a Muslim reformer such as Muhammad Jumat Imam, with the necessary talent and initiative and, at the same time, with little prospect of advancement within the Muslim community and sufficiently disillusioned with the status quo, to offer a novel, irenic interpretation of Christian and Muslim teaching and practice which was credible to believers in both traditions.

We will return to the question of the interaction between the aladura movement and Islam when, in the following and later chapters, we discuss at greater length the ideas of that other previously mentioned Ijebu prophet, Joseph Oshitelu, founder of the Church of the Lord, aladura. Meanwhile, we can consider briefly Muhammad Jumat Imam's relations with Traditional religion.

The reformer and the Traditional religion.

By the 1930s, as we have already seen, a majority of Ijebu had converted to either Christianity or Islam. This notwithstanding, Traditional religion not only retained a hold over these converts but also remained a force in its own right. Indeed, for many while the power of Christianity lay in its literacy, real spiritual power resided with the old gods. A number of traditional cults such as the Oro and Egungun continued to function. Other cults still considered important in Ijebu-Ode at this time were those of Agemo and Obiren Ojowu. The former is centred on a spirit associated with the founder of the city, Obanta, and the latter on a deified spirit of a woman who travelled with Obanta to Ijebu-Ode as one of his guiding spirits.[79]

While snails were sacrificed to the Agemo, Obiren Ijowu was offered dog as was Ogun, god of iron and by extension of all those who work with or use iron. In the case of Obiren Ojowu fasting was required in preparation for worship and women were the chief worshippers, and the same was true in the case of the cult of the trickster god Eshu. Muhammad Jumat Imam more in line with the conservative than the modernising group

of reform-minded Muslim clerics in Yorubaland not only condemned the Traditional religion but even requested the colonial administration to have it banned. On more that one occasion he rounded on the Oro society in Ijebu-Ode and the Agemo priests, of whom there were sixteen, accusing them, among other things, of preventing women from going about their lawful business and of attempting to cause harm to them and others by magical means. He received the support of the aladura Christ Apostolic Church for taking this stand.[80]

On other occasions he even went as far as the highly conservative Muslim Yoruba reformer Al-Iluri by condemning the traditional practice of scarification or facial markings, prostration before elders and dignitaries and the use of names relating to the traditional divinities as first or family names.

This, however, was his public stance while in private he practised a number of the things he condemned, even anathematised, such as dealings with the Egungun or spirits of the dead.[81] There were other instances, as we shall see below, where the public and private persona of Muhammad Jumat Imam did not match.

The reformer as dreamer and visionary .

As already stated, there can be no rounded understanding of Muhammad Jumat Imam, reformer turned self-proclaimed Mahdi-Messiah, without some insight into his private thoughts and opinions concerning his own abilities, ambitions and his divine calling. Some insight of this kind can be had from his private papers which, taken alone and out of context, and viewed from another perspective than that of a committed follower, reveal a highly eccentric man obsessed with himself.[82]

From a consideration of the maps that he was accustomed to draw and which are contained in these private papers he clearly saw himself as a world-saver. He stands upright in the centre of the world with arrows pointing inward towards Nigeria, then Ijebu-Ode, then Idepo Street where he lived, and finally to their ultimate objective, himself. Moreover,

Muhammad Jumat Imam's review of his own life sees him on reflection and with the benefit of hindsight, attaching supernatural significance to all that happened to him. All became a sign that he was singled out by God to fulfil an important mission. He refers to his being born on a Friday as a "great sign", and in the same way to his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1926, to the fact that he was spared during the influenza epidemic of 1918 and the yellow fever epidemic of 1926.

However, it was not, he states, until 1936, that he began to pay serious attention to these "signs" and to "voices" from God. In that year he received a divine command to write an epistle (wathiqat) to all of Nigeria's Muslim leaders to warn them of the need to follow more faithfully in the path of Allah.

Faith in his own ability was his driving force. In another section of these papers called "hidden secrets" which deals with this virtue, he wrote:

> "He who has faith in himself may become anything and do anything. . .to enter faith is to inwardly feel that I am the son of God."[83]

Muhammad Jumat Imam's papers also reveal a pre-occupation with an impending disaster in the form of World War II. There are also numerous references to biblical passages bearing on the signs of this catastrophe which will precede the coming of "the Lord and salvation", for example Joel 3 vv1-5, Jeremiah 50 vv30-44, Isaiah 55 vv3-6, Matthew 24 vv6-7 and Acts 3 vv22-23. However, all will be well for Britain since God had favoured her and ensured her protection by choosing from among her colonial subjects the Messiah who would slay the Antichrist, Hitler.

The reformer's record of his dreams and visions portray the same self-confidence. In an entry for November 12th 1933, he wrote:

> "I used to dream wonderfully from my youth, staying with the angels or descending with them from heaven. The Angel Gabriel saluted me and said 'Greetings from our Lord' and immediately I found myself with a crown in my hand bearing the inscription 'best of all'."[84]

December 6th 1938 was the occasion for a call from another important celestial visitor

who, under order from St.Michael, informed him that God had chosen him to give a message to all Muslims. From this time onwards celestial spirits make regular appearances in his dreams culminating in the appearance on August 29th 1941 of the "Spirit of Truth" who offered him a crown if he would devote himself entirely to God's service.

All of this would seem to suggest that one is in the presence not only of an extremely ambitious but also of a highly eccentric individual, and of one suffering from an acute form of paranoia. Muhammad Jumat Imam's mental and emotional state are discussed at length in the next two chapters and it can be simply noted here, therefore, that while he was seen as ambitious, he was also regarded as highly gifted. But no one suggested he was insane principally for the reason that he did not manifest the traditional symptoms of madness - speaking aloud to oneself in public, wearing long, unkempt hair and going about unclothed or naked.[85]

On the other hand all, opponents and followers alike, regarded him as something of an eccentric. This, however, was not to his disadvantage for in Yoruba society a degree of eccentricity - it is important, as will be shown in the next chapter, that there be neither too much nor too little - is an essential part of the stuff of charisma, and Muhammad Jumat Imam, it will be seen, was a charismatic leader.

In addition to his eccentric behaviour, his presence also lent support to his charisma. Those who knew Muhammad Jumat Imam described him as a tall man, with piercing dark eyes, and a thick black beard. In all weathers he unfailingly wore a black cape over his long white robe and was always seen, as he moved about swiftly and purposefully, carrying a staff which resembled a bishops crozier, and which, we may note, resembled the staff of office carried by the prophets of the Cherubim and Seraphim church, an aladura church with a branch in Ijebu-Ode.

As he went about his business with an air of self-assurance, conveying to all the impression that he was in control of events, Muhammad Jumat Imam ensured that he was

never alone; like a feudal chief he was always accompanied by a number of his followers who might well have been mistaken for retainers. This was but another way in which he sought to impress others, for in Yoruba society as Bascom observed:

> "one of the important measures of social position is the number and rank of individuals who associate with a person and particularly who accompany him when he goes about town. No man of high rank will be seen in the streets alone."[86]

None of this, however, diminished the esteem in which he was held as a reformer. Indeed, some who knew him well and were later to become well established Islamic scholars in a western context, among them the late Professor Muhammad Abdul of the University of Ibadan's Arabic and Islamic studies department, spoke of his "undeniable competence as a Muslim teacher". For Abdul his only mistake was to proclaim himself the Mahdi-Messiah. But even this step did not deprive him of all support among Muslims. According to Abdul:

> " even when he declared himself to be the Messiah at least half of those who supported his reform movement rallied round him because of what they would gain from the reforms he was introducing into Islam and into Islamic practice."[87]

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the many influences - mahdist, sufi, modernising and conservative Muslim reformist, Christian mission and aladura or praying church - that went into the making of Muhammad Jumat Imam, the modernising Muslim reformer. We have noted his alleged disappointment on two occasions - in the case of the Ijebu Central mosque on the one hand and on the other in the case of the Ahmadiyya movement - at not being appointed to the post of chief imam. His private thoughts shed further light on this ambition and also reveal his hankering after ever greater recognition.

Unacceptable to the traditional Muslim leadership, Muhammad Jumat Imam increasingly began to look for a larger following by drawing together Muslims and Christians in a society in ideological ferment and one that had been left leaderless and directionless by the crisis of royal legitimacy following on the introduction of the "Sole Native Authority"

system. By January 1942, with Ijebuland deeply confused and divided by this affair and with local involvement in World War II much more of a reality, Muhammad Jumat Imam believed the time had come for him to announce to the Ijebu that God had called him to be the Mahdi-Messiah with a mission to lay the foundation stones of a New Jerusalem and thereby save them and the world from self destruction. It is to a more detailed examination of the shape and content of this message and mission that we now turn.

1. B. G. M. Sundkler, Bantu Prophets in South Africa, London: Oxford University Press, 1961 (second edition), p. 125.

2. S. S. Walker, The Religious Revolution in the Ivory Coast: The Prophet Harris and The Harrist Church, Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1983.

3. J. F. C. Harrison, The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780-1850, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 229

4. Sundkler, Bantu Prophets in South Africa, op. cit., p. 125.
See also on the educational and social background of African Christian prophets: B. R. Wilson, Magic and the Millennium, London: Heinemann, 1973. And id., The Noble Savages, op. cit., pp. 58-82.

5. See Ryan, Imale: Yoruba Participation in the Muslim Tradition, op. cit; chaps IV and V.

6. Bidmus, "A Literary Appraisal of the Arabic Writings of the Yoruba Ulama", op.cit., pp. 76 ff.

7. See: Paden, Religion and Political Culture in Kano, op. cit., p. 185 and passim regarding disturbances triggered by disputes over the correct position of the arms at prayer.

8. J. O. Hunwick, "Neo-Hanbalism in Southern Nigeria: the Reformist Ideas of al Hajj Adam al-Iluri of Agege", (Paper presented to the conference on Islam in Africa: the Changing Role of the Ulama, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, March 1984)

9. Bidmus, "A Literary Appraisal of the Arabic Writings of the Yoruba Ulama," op. cit., p. 71.

10. Ibid. p.75

11. Hunwick, "Neo-Hanballism in Southern Nigeria.." op. cit.

12. Bidmus, "A Literary Appraisal of the Arabic Writings of the Yoruba Ulama," op. cit., p. 95.

13. Ibid.p.152

14. Ibid.p.153

15. Ibid.

16. J. P. Hubbard, "Government and Islamic Education in Northern Nigeria, (1900-1940)", in G.N.Brown and M. Hiskett (eds), Conflict and Harmony in Education in Tropical Africa, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975, pp. 152 ff.

17. Gbadamosi, The Growth of Islam Among The Yoruba, 1841-1908, op. cit; pp. 135 ff.

18. H. J. Fisher, "The Modernization of Islamic Education in Sierra Leone, The Gambia

and Liberia: Religion and Language", in Conflict and Harmony in Education in Tropical Africa, (eds) G.N.Brown and M.Hiskett op. cit., pp. 187-200.

19. N.A.I. Ije-Prof. 4/1316: report of Ijebu Friendly society for the ten years ending 28th, October 1937.

20. Ibid.

21. There is a copy of the "modern" marriage rite in my possession.

22. N.A.I. (MF). 53 (University of Ibadan Library): "Private Papers of Hadji M. J. Imam", (Henceforth: Private Papers M.J.Imam). This information and much that follows is also based on interviews (1976-78,1980, 1981) with the chief imam of the Mahdiyya mosques, Ijebu-Ode, the imam of the Mahdiyya mosque Ibadan, and the "khalifas" or representatives in Ijebu-Igbo and Epe.

23. Ibid.

24. J. Goody, "The Consequences of Literacy," Literacy in Traditional Societies, (ed) J.Goody, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 27-69.

25. A. J. Williams, "The Role of the Prophet in Millenial Cults: Politico-Religious Movements in Jamaica", B. Litt, University of Oxford, 1974.

26. N.A.I. Ije-Prof. 2 C.138. (This file contains the government's correspondence concerning the background and activities of the Mahdi-Messiah).

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Interviews with Mahdists, Ijebuland and Ibadan, 1976-78; 1980;1981.

30. N.A.I. Ije-Prof 2.C.138 op.cit.

31. Gbadamosi, The Growth of Islam Among The Yoruba, op. cit., pp. 10-13 and passim.

32. Paden, Religion and Political Culture in Kano, op. cit., pp. 73 ff.

33. Ibid. p. 173. Also: L. Brenner, West African Sufi: The Religious Heritage & Spiritual Search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal, London: C. Hurst, 1984, p. 40.

34. N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/1/06790/60.

35. N.A.I.(U.I.L.): Private Papers of M.J.Imam, op.cit.

36. N.A.I. Ije-Prof. 4.J.819.

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38. P. R. McKenzie, Inter-Religious Encounters in West Africa, Leicester: University of Leicester, 1976 p.24.

39. Brown and Hiskett (eds), Conflict and Harmony in Education in Tropical Africa, op. cit.

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41. The Yoruba News, Ibadan, September 29th 1929.

42. T. Asuni, "Socio-Medical Problems of Religious Converts", Psychopathologie Africaine, Vol. IX, 2, 1973 pp. 223-236.

43. W. R. Bascom, "Social Status, Wealth and Individual Differences among the Yoruba", American Anthropologist, No. 53, 1951.

44. N.A.I. Ije-Prof 4/1316.

45. N.A.I. Daily Service, 17th October, 1942.

46. N.A.I. (U.I.L): Private papers of M.J.Imam, op.cit.

47. N.A.I. Oyo-Prof 1/662. The Assistant District Officer of Ilesha, A. D. Childs, reports here of Ijebu women who,"flock in great numbers to Ilesha to prophet Babalola to obtain blessed water." And as a consequence, "The roads are blocked and the markets are chock-a block (sic) with lorries which have brought passengers in from a distance".

48. Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) Intelligencer, (monthly journal) September, 1876, p. 541.

49. See: McKenzie, Inter-Religious Encounters in West Africa op.cit; also P. B. Clarke, The Christian Encounter with Islam in West Africa, London: Ethnographica (forthcoming); Gbadamosi, The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908, op. cit; pp 131-133 and passim.

50. Gbadamosi, The Growth of Islam Among The Yoruba 1841-1908 op. cit., pp. 128-133 and pp. 215-216.

51. E. D. A. Hulmes, "Christian Attitudes to Islam: A Comparative Study of the Work of S.A.Crowder, E.W.Blyden and W.R.S. Miller", D.Phil. (Oxon), 1980.

52. Ibid.

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54. Interview with Al-Hajj Qadri, Mahdiyya Mosque, Ijebu-Ode , 30th April, 1977.

55. Interview with Al-Hajj Mudarisu, Ijebu-Ode, 23th April,1978.

56. Interview with Al-Hajj Tijani, Ibadan, 7th April,1978.

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58. Interview with Mr Kuku of the Ahmadiyya movement, Ijebu-Ode, 22nd October, 1977.

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60. Interview with Pastor Shadare Sesebe, Ijebu-Ode, 7th April, 1978.

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66. Ibid.

67. H. J. Fisher, "Dreams and Conversion in Black Africa" in N. Levtzion (ed), Conversion to Islam, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979, pp. 217-35.

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71. Turner, History of An Independent African Church, op. cit., Vol.I pp. 41-42.

72. Peel, Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba, op. cit; p. 164

73. Interview with the Archbishop of Cherubim and Seraphim, Ibadan, 27th July, 1978.

74. Peel, Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba, op. cit; pp. 64-65.

75. P. B. Clarke, West Africans at War 1914-18 and 1939-45, London: Ethnographica, 1987.

76. Peel, Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba, op. cit., p. 65.

77. Pastor D. O. Odubanjo, The End of the Age: Christ is Coming Soon, Lagos: (no publisher given), 1947.

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79. G. B. Sokefun, "Worship in the African Traditional Religion with particular reference to Ijebu-Ode", (Long essay, Dept. of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, 1968).

80. N.A.I. Ije-Prof. 1/779 (Festivals in Ijebu-Ode).

81. This point was made during several interviews with non-mahdists in Ijebuland, 1976-1978 and 1980-81.

82. N.A.I. (U.I.L): Private Papers of M.J.Imam op.cit.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.

85. Interviews with Ijebu, both mahdists and non-mahdists, 1978; 1980; 1981.

86. Bascom, "Social Status ,Wealth and Individual Differences among the Yoruba," op. cit; p. 493.

87. Interview with Professor M. O. Abdul, Ibadan, 3rd March, 1977.

Chapter 5 : The New Jerusalem

While clearly a man on the move, one venturing, albeit cautiously, into new territory, Muhammad Jumat Imam would not have fulfilled himself as a charismatic leader without a millenarian context: without that strife torn, anomic Ijebu environment that spoke through him, so to speak, and gave his words and deeds their own prophetic and soteriological significance. Bereft of the millenarian ambience described in chapter three he would probably have remained no more and no less than a respected Muslim reformer.

This chapter focuses on Muhammad Jumat Imam's millenarian message and activities: his efforts to create a new moral community as the vehicle of Ijebu and through the Ijebu world redemption and symbolised in the temple which he constructed and which he named the "Mosjidi Zahir" or Temple of the New Jerusalem. The idea of such a temple was not new in the Yoruba context; the African Church and/ or National Church of Africa founded in the 1920s in Lagos by Adedeji Ishola who claimed a divine calling to free Africans from "religious bondage" and establish a religion that was neither, "tainted with dogmatism nor adorned colonialism", promoted the idea of a New Temple, as did the Ijebu prophet Oshitelu.[1]

However, for many Ijebu the Mahdi-Messiah's message was very different from anything they had ever heard; it was a new revelation in that it was the first time the true teaching of Islam concerning Christianity and many other matters relating to their faith had been made known. However, before considering the novel character of and the response to his message both below and at even greater length in the following chapter, a review of the details of the formal proclamation of the New Jerusalem will serve as a useful introduction to the discussion of these central issues.

The Proclamation

It was shown in the previous chapter that Muhammad Jumat Imam claimed supernatural approval and encouragement from both Christian and Muslim sources for his mission of

peace and unity. It was also mentioned that in 1941 several respectable members of the aladura movement and at least one senior member of the Muslim community had been informed in a dream that God had called him to fulfil a special task. In this respect the beginnings of the Mahdiyya movement resembled that of many other prophet inspired movements in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly those parts exposed to Christian influence. A well known example in West Africa is the already mentioned Liberian prophet William Wadé Harris - said to have converted over one hundred thousand to Christianity in the southern Ivory Coast and Ghana in a matter of a year and a few months (1913-14) - who was informed in a vision by the Archangel Gabriel of his calling to preach the word of God.[2]

Compelled to obey God's will now that his divine calling had been unmistakably and independently confirmed by trustworthy and widely respected Muslim and Christian prophets Muhammad Jumat Imam's next step was to obtain approval in the traditional manner from the awujale to proclaim his message. Yoruba tradition required anyone with a new religious idea or acrobatic or magical display to make it known first of all to the awujale (king) and his advisers before presenting it to the general public. Armed, therefore, with the backing from at least certain sections of the Ijebu Muslim and Christian communities and anxious to avoid any misunderstanding with the colonial authorities, he set out on December 21st 1941 for the royal palace or afin where he was given his licence to pre·ch, albeit reluctantly, as will be seen. Supporting his claims with quotations from the Bible and the Qur'an Muhammad Jumat Imam announced to the awujale that he was the expected Mahdi of the Muslims and the awaited Messiah of the Christians. He further informed the king that if he and his subjects accepted him as the Mahdi-Messiah God would raise Ijebu-Ode to the status of a holy city, indeed the holiest city on earth, attracting there pilgrims from all over the world. This was more than an appeal to civic pride; it was a form of civic millenarianism that turned the city of Ijebu-Ode into a vehicle

for Ijebu and through them world transformation. However, if he were to be rejected, Ijebu-Ode would be punished and God would bestow his favours on the "rival" city of Ile-Ife.[3] Again, following the Muslim and aladura practice and local custom whereby Yoruba prophets, among them the aladura Prophet Oshitelu with whom he has already been compared, the Mahdi-Messiah left the town for a period of time to fast and recollect his thoughts before making his public proclamation on January 2nd 1942.

The proclamation was made outside the town gate, the Ayi gate, where an estimated one thousand people had gathered to hear it. Accompanied by the younger and more junior of his two wives -later to be appointed as the Shaikha-Mahdi, his deputy, leader of his female disciples, and his successor - the self proclaimed Mahdi-Messiah told the assembled gathering that his momentous announcement was being made outside the town because:

" The Spirit of God had deserted Ijebu-Ode on account of its evil ways."[4]

Holding a copy of the Bible in one hand and of the Qur'an in the other he asked the assembled crowd to accept him as the Mahdi-Messiah and admonished them to believe in God and to accept as his prophets Jesus, son of Mary, Muhammad and himself as one of the prophets. He gave most attention in his address to his divine calling explaining that God had destined him from birth - the Yoruba have, as was made clear in chapter two, a strong belief in destiny - to be a prophet and had made this known both to himself and to others through signs, dreams and visions. However, he had only become fully aware of his true destiny in 1941.

He then disclosed some of the principal supernatural signs, dreams and visions that had been used by God to mark him out as the Mahdi-Messiah. Among the signs were the day of his birth, a Friday and the Muslim holy day, and his name, Jumat, which had the same numerical value in Arabic - 118 - as masib or messiah.[5] ..Other telling signs were the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1926 where a certain Shaykh allegedly prophesied that the future Mahdi was among the pilgrims at Mecca that year, and the delegation from the Christ Apostolic

Church led by a Mr Otufale in 1938 that urged him to:

> "struggle harder in the way of the Lord because God would use him for the dissemination of his word among the peoples".[6]

He also recalled the visits he received while sleeping from the Angel Gabriel and St.Michael who informed him that God had chosen him to proclaim his message to all Christians, and his vision of being seated on the right hand of the Prophet Muhammad in paradise who commissioned him to warn all Muslims to mend their ways. He then went on to recount the dreams concerning his mission experienced by the above mentioned members of the Aladura churches and the elder Muslim spokesman Al-hajj Eleri.

After his public declaration the Mahdi-Messiah wrote to inform political and religious authorities - the colonial governor, the pope, the emirs of northern Nigeria, bishops in western Nigeria -of his advent. In his letter to the colonial governor he stated:

> "It gives me great pleasure to bring to your honour's notice the message of Allah, the Almighty God, the creator of Heaven and Earth, the King of Kings, the Lord of the World and the most powerful over all things. This (his own advent) is not a strange thing for it is the fulfilment of God's promise found in the Holy Books, the Qur'an and Bible, that when the end of the World is approaching He will raise up the last prophet to guide the people along the right path to salvation."

The letter continued with a statement of aims which were given as:

> "The proclamation of the Kingdom of heaven all over the world, the establishment of universal peace and the leading of all Muslims, Christians and Pagans along the only path to salvation."[7]

One of his more interesting, detailed and potentially troublesome letters was that addressed to the Sultan of Sokoto, the spiritual leader of the northern Nigerian Muslims. It was this letter that gave most cause for alarm to the colonial administration in the early days after the proclamation. Although the colonial government had kept a close watch on the Mahdi-Messiah there had been nothing to report so far in the way of civil or religious strife in Ijebu-Ode itself as a result of the proclamation. However, nervous as it always was about mahdist manifestations, the colonial government was alarmed by this letter written in good Arabic to the Sultan of Sokoto and copied to eight other emirs including the Shehu of

Borno, seeing it as a very likely cause of disturbances. Therefore, in order to pre-empt the northern Muslim leadership from reacting in a way that could give rise to civil disorder, the colonial government dismissed the letter as the ravings of a lunatic, and this appeared to satisfy the emirs.

Parts of the letter are, nonetheless, worth citing for the light they shed on Muhammad Jumat Imam's state of mind, intentions and self understanding. For example, in it he declared:

> " I become now by the wish of the Almighty a Shaykh, a Messiah and a Mahdi...Allah gave to me the key to everything in this world and in the hereafter, and a seal for sealing the work of the ancients among the prophets and the saints. I have in my right hand the Qur'an, in the left, the Gospel. I am invested with the sword that will kill the Antichrist...This is the century of the Messiah and the Mahdi...whoever wishes let him believe; and whoever does not let him disbelieve, (Qur'an 18v29)."[8]

Whenever he preached and to whomsoever he wrote Muhammad Jumat Imam presented himself as the peacemaker and worldsaver: "I am he who, God has promised, will bring peace"; "I am the expected messenger, the saviour and redeemer of every nation", he told his audiences and warned them that the World War now raging was due to lust, greed, covetousness and dishonesty and would destroy them all if they did not heed his message which essentially offered a moral solution to what was seen as a moral problem, the problem of strife and disunity at the local and international levels.[9]

Merging Cross and Crescent in the Temple of the New Jerusalem.

In another of his letters addressed to various dignitaries and officials the Mahdi-Messiah speaks of plans to build the Temple of Peace, the Temple of the New Jerusalem, the "Secure House of the Lord", and of his own role as peacemaker among Christians and Muslims. At the end of his earthly mission - he would, of course, continue after death until his "thousand year reign" was over - there would be only one temple used by both Muslims and Christians and this would be the clearest sign of the beginning of the New Jerusalem.[10]

The inspiration behind the building of a temple for Muslims and Christians came in the form of a vision in April 1943 when the Mahdi-Messiah was in seclusion in the forested area, known locally as the "jungle", of Ago-Iwoye, some five miles outside Ijebu-Ode and close to the sacred grove of Oke-Eri. There, according to legend, the Queen of Sheba, a biblical-quranic figure and undoubtedly an influence on the thinking of the Mahdi-Messiah, is buried.[11] As the Queen of Sheba of the Bible and Bilqis of the Qur'an this legendary figure is claimed by Christians and Muslims alike as a Yoruba saint and both visit her grave where they pray and make sacrifices in her name to have their petitions answered. Most fittingly, then, it was at Oke-Eri, while on retreat, that the Mahdi-Messiah was told by God not only to build the Mosjidi Zahir, the Temple of the New Jerusalem, in which Christians and Muslims would worship together, but also to ordain the younger of his two wives, Shaikha Rahmatu Mahdi, as his partner, successor and leader of the womens' section of the movement.

The "ordination" of his second wife, as was previously pointed out in chapter two and elsewhere in this study, did not involve a radical break with custom, nor was it unusual in aladura circles. Prophet Oshitelu appointed his mother as the first lady president of the Church of the Lord, and on her death, he replaced her with one of his married daughters.[12] However, while the Mahdi-Messiah's choice of a woman as his co-partner may not have constituted a break with tradition the reason why he preferred his second to his first wife for this role reflects his modernising tendency for it undoubtedly had much to do with the fact that the former was literate: under the Mahdiyya constitution leaders were required to be literate in Arabic and English, requirements which disqualified his senior wife.

Also on the occasion being discussed here the Mahdi-Messiah received, as Oshitelu had previously received, a covenant from God. This covenant, which his followers were to carry wherever they went, even to Mecca, was contained in a black box known as the Ark of the Covenant and consisted of a copy of the Bible and Qur'an, the movement's emblem

- a green and white flag - its motto "Spirit of Truth", and a message to the British Government which was prefaced with citations from the prophets including Joel 2 v28, Nahum II vv1-2, Jeremiah 50 vv30-44 and Isaiah 55 vv 3-6. Part of it reads:

> " I am a messenger from Almighty God to the whole world, especially the British Government. The message is addressed to the whole world and to Muslims, Christians and Heathens. God has ordered me to deliver this message in the open fields because the Holy Spirit is no more in the town."[13]

While the immediate British reaction to the Ark of the Covenant was once again to dismiss it as but one further sign of Muhammad Jumat Imam's madness it was to prove, as will be seen, a considerable embarrassment to them at a later date in Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, the foundations of the Temple of the New Jerusalem were laid in April 1944 and when completed the architectural style of the edifice reflected the Mahdi's intention that his movement should be an integrated Muslim -Christian movement: it was built in the form of a cross to resemble a church while supporting a minaret on the right side of its sloping roof. Over the main entrance there were inscriptions from both the Qur'an and Bible and the Mahdiyya motto "Spirit of Truth".

Such millenarian activities as these constituted an attempt to create religious and moral unity in a society that was seen to be rapidly disintegrating. They were also evidently an attempt to come to terms with Christian/ European ideas and assumptions about the individual and society without rejecting one's Muslim and Yoruba/African identity. The citations from the Old and New Testaments and the Qur'an, the resort to Christian and Muslim interpretations of dreams and visions, the cruciform temple with the minarets, and the introduction of literacy in Arabic and English as requirements for leadership, these and other measures point to an endeavour to create a synthesis between Christian and Muslim and European and African, the African dimension, it will be seen below, becoming much more pronounced as the nationalist struggle got under way after World War II. And the same attempt at a marriage between these traditions can be seen in the Mahdi-Messiah's

prescription for the moral transformation of society.

The commandments of the New Jerusalem

The Mahdi-Messiah's commandments reflected Ijebu concerns with the painful consequences arising from ever-increasing tension and conflict between the western educated and the traditionalists, Christians and Muslims, the older and younger generations, those within the modern sector of the economy and those outside of it and the clearly observable breakdown of community moral control. As regards the latter there was widespread dismay at what was perceived to be the sharp decline in moral and ethical standards, particularly among the western educated youth, some of whom signalled their emancipation by disrespecting traditional norms, from politeness and respect for elders to dress and courtship.

Six of the ten commandments ordered people to "abstain" from such vices as pride, greed, envy, covetousness, anger, lying and cheating, while the remaining four exhorted them to prayer, truthfulness in all things, love of neighbour and respect for God's prophets. As in virtually everything else there was a recognizably Christian millenarian dimension to these commandments which was expressed in the promise that those who joined the Mahdi-Messiah in observing them would help bring about the realization of that petition in the Lord's prayer: "Thy will be done upon earth".[14]

The second of the "new" commandments - avoidance of greed - was particularly important, for in the Mahdi-Messiah's interpretation of events, greed lay at the root of all strife whether it was the strife resulting from the awujale controversy, strife between old and young, between Christians and Muslims, or between nations. It was even responsible for what the Mahdi-Messiah saw as the clearest sign of the end of the present age, the Second World War.

Whether taken together or singly the "new" commandments show, as might be expected in a community undergoing a process of fragmentation, a changing attitude to moral rules

in the Ijebuland of the 1930s where intracommunity interdependence was in marked decline and with it the customary loyalty and almost automatic respect for community norms. They signal a shift to a morality grounded in the will of each individual and less in the community that was rapidly loosing its cohesion and in almost complete disarray. This morality, a development rather than a revolutionary change as the discussion in chapter two of the Yoruba notion of destiny and of the traditional latitude alowed to individual initiative in that society shows, was clearly more relevant and suited to a society such as Ijebuland experiencing the disruption of its ordered, certain way of life brought on by the transition to modernity.

Although there was, as chapter two made clear, considerable scope for individual initiative in Ijebu, and more generally Yoruba society, morality was still at this point in time, to a great extent, largely community regulated, something that was only possible where, as was once the case in Ijebu society, there was a high level of face to face contact and community integration. In this situation shame, loss of face, loyalty to one's community, although never the sole motives for behaviour, were, nonetheless, among the strongest. However, with group solidarity and cohesion seriously impaired, and people much more alone and left to their own personal devices, and with increasing numbers of men and women involved either directly or indirectly in the modern sector of the economy and many more of the young learning new ways in western type schools, morality at this new turning point in Ijebu history, could no longer depend for support, at least not to the same extent as in the past, either on such motives as those just mentioned or on a well buttressed social personality.

A similar emphasis on motive, intention and personal responsibility is to be found in the Mahdi-Messiah's teachings on religion. These teachings were written down by the founder of the Mahdiyya movement in a series of short treatises and show considerable continuity with those of the reform period discussed in the previous chapter.[15] However, while he

remained orthodox, albeit at times in a local, Ijebu way, his teaching on prophecy, faith and prayer, which will be our main concern here, was so imbued with an inward, mystical character that it gave rise to fierce opposition from certain sections of the Muslim community. We will consider first his teaching on prophecy.

The "eternal spirit" of prophecy

Much of what Muhammad Jumat Imam had to say concerning prophecy was, not surprisingly, a defence of his own claim to be the Mahdi-Messiah beginning with the declaration speech that he made on January 2nd 1942 which, as already noted, was largely a catalogue of the signs that proved he had been chosen by God from birth for this role. However, there were many that he failed to convince, the "blind" as he called them, some of whom attempted to test the validity of his claim by such judicial processes as trial by ordeal.

This was the response, as already mentioned, of the leader of the Ahmadiyya movement in Ijebu-Ode, a certain Mr Kuku, who challenged the self proclaimed Mahdi-Messiah to prove he was telling the truth by publicly swallowing fire and charging him that if he burned his mouth in the process then his claim was a false one. The challenge was apparently declined leaving Mr Kuku satisfied that he was in the presence of a charlatan.[16] The opposition from others was of a more rational and persistent kind, obliging the Mahdi-Messiah to return continually in his writings and preaching to the Old and New Testament and the Qur'an for further support for his prophetic calling, reinforcing the evidence culled from these sources by appeals to the impartial nature of divine justice, claiming that God, since he had raised up prophets from other races, would not have left the Black race without its own prophet.

This appeal to God's impartiality in selecting his prophets notwithstanding, what was clearly a major stumbling block for many of his critics was Muhammad Jumat Imam's place of birth. How could a Muslim prophet come from a small, unknown, non-Arabic

speaking, Yoruba town such as Ijebu-Ode, they asked. Muhammad Jumat Imam's response was to demonstrate the divine predilection for his city by pointing to the Qur'an, chapter (sura) 9v 89, where he told his critics, since Ijebu-Ode was mentioned there as "Jabu" it was clearly destined by God from all eternity for the salvific mission which had begun with his proclamation in January 1942.

All of this was corroborated, he argued, by the fact that there was also a biblical reference to Ijebu-Ode in the form of "Jebusite". Moreover, relying on hadith, tradition, he argued that the prophet Muhammad had foretold that the Mahdi would come from Kada which had the same numerical value in Arabic as Ijebu-Ode.[17] Numerology became one of the principal techniques used by Muhammad Jumat Imam in support of his claims, and proved to be, as will be seen in the following chapter, a most effective one.

Even more controversial for orthodox Muslims than the claim that the town of Ijebu-Ode was the divinely chosen vehicle of world renovation was his own claim to prophethood which if accepted would have clearly undermined the belief in the prophet Muhammad as the seal of the prophets. To answer his critics on this point Muhammad Jumat Imam developed his own particular interpretation of the meaning of the phrase "seal of the prophets". He dismissed those who interpreted this to mean that the prophet Muhammad was the last of the prophets as either ignorant or self interested. Ignorant because they clearly knew very little Arabic and even less history. The word for end or final, he would explain to his following, was "intera", and if the Qur'an had intended to state that Muhammad was the final or last prophet it would have used this word and not "hatim", ring or seal, which could not possibly mean this.[18]

In using "hatim", he told them, the Qur'an simply conveys the idea that Muhammad was a true prophet like all true prophets before him, among whom were numbered Moses, Solomon and Jesus, and nothing whatsoever about the period after Muhammad.[19] Moreover, people who held to the view that Muhammad was the last of the prophets were ignorant

of the "Ages of Prophecy". Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad were all assigned a period of one thousand years as "their age". Muhammad Jumat Imam had been raised up by God in this, the Last Age, to bring to an end, after a period of one thousand years, the "Ages of Prophecy".[20] His own rule would last for one thousand years in that after death he would rule from paradise through his successors and his representatives, the "khalifas", of the Mahdiyya movement.

The Mahdi-Messiah supported his charge that those who opposed this interpretation were motivated by self-interest by returning to the "divine impartiality" argument which he made into a test of peoples' loyalty to their race and nationalist conviction. There was a lack of consistency here for his claim to be the prophet of the black race was in direct contradiction to his statements in his Tawhid where he declares himself to be the person chosen from among all the nations to propagate God's word and to lead all men to their Creator.[21] This notwithstanding, it was to be heard with increasing frequency as the nationalist movement in Nigeria intensified its efforts after World War II to regain independence, and won over a considerable number of new members to the Mahdiyya movement. Likewise his predictions that the British government - for which he showed great admiration when a reformer - would soon leave the country.

Although this line of argument generated much support for the Mahdi-Messiah one of the more convincing proofs developed by him against those who believed that Muhammad was the last of the prophets and therefore rejected his own claim, was based on the idea of an "eternal Spirit of prophecy".

The "eternal Spirit of prophecy" argument was summed up in the following manner by one of the Mahdi-Messiah's sons:

> "All the true prophets have either claimed or others have claimed on their behalf that they were the last of the prophets. This was claimed of Moses, and Jesus said that he was the Alpha and the Omega. Well many true prophets followed all of these. Muhammad followed Jesus. Can we say Muhammad was lying, can we say Jesus was lying? No. We accept that they are prophets and they are prophets like

> all other prophets because there is one Spirit of prophecy who is in them all and this Spirit has no end. Jesus, for example, could say he was the Alpha and the Omega because it was the eternal Spirit of prophecy speaking through him. That Spirit is Gabriel working in all of these true prophets. Therefore when Jesus departed, Gabriel remained, when Muhammad departed Gabriel remained. And so there can always be true prophets."[22]

While the substance of this ingenious argument remains for the most part unaltered - it is the eternal Spirit of prophecy speaking through the individual prophet that enables the latter to claim rightly to be the last prophet - there is no overall agreement among Mahdists as to who this Spirit actually is. According to some, as in the above quotation, it is Gabriel, while others believe it to be the Holy Spirit who inspires all prophets to speak of themselves in this way.

One further line of argument used by the Mahdi-Messiah to justify his prophetic calling that may be mentioned here, more for purposes of completeness than for its ingenuity, was derived from his theory about the Last Judgment, a frequent theme in his preaching, and how God would accomplish this. All those who refused to obey God's will would be punished with hell fire. However, in order to know who these people were God, who could not be present among his people, appointed prophets like himself, to do this work on his behalf. In these Last Days God who has "no human faculties and is incapable of any physical movement" had assigned to the Mahdi-Messiah the duty of informing Him of all those who refused to follow the only path to salvation which was now being revealed.[23] These arguments were variations on the theme of the absolute equality of all "true" prophets of God and formed an integral part of Muhammad Jumat Imam's doctrinal defence in the post declaration era of his claims to be a genuine prophet of God. The extent to which they made any significant difference to the way in which people responded to his message will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

Meanwhile, it can be noted here that the Mahdi-Messiah also made effective use of the title renewer and or regenerator (mujaddid) discussed in chapter one. His use of this title

is of interest in that it throws further light on the influence on his thinking of both Sufi and Ahmadi ideas, an influence already referred to in several chapters. In one of his tracts, already cited, Muhammad Jumat Imam writes of himself as the last of the four renewers sent to "test and sieve out" the righteous from among the "uncivilized" by which he means pagans and/or unbelievers, the other three being Shaykh Jalayni, founder of the Qadariyya Sufi order, Shaykh al-Tijani, founder of the Tijaniyya order and the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement, Ghulam Ahmad, the Mahdi-Messiah of Qadian.[24]

This reference to himself as the Mujaddid not only reflects Sufi brotherhood and Ahmadi influence but also indicates a groping in Muhammad Jumat Imam's thinking towards the position of a renewer for every age and/or locality, an interpretation discussed in chapter one when examining al-Suyuti's treatise on the mujaddid.

But it is not only in his thinking about the renewer that we can detect Sufi brotherhood influence on the Mahdi-Messiah's teaching and approach to religion as can be seen from his campaign to "spiritualize" religion.

The "spiritualization" of religion

Central to the Mahdi-Messiah's message was the notion of religion as primarily interior. As previously indicated, he constantly spoke out against the mechanical performance of prayer and insisted that every act of worship should be preceded by an act of intention for it to be valid. One can detect here faith turning inward in a society not only undergoing rapid cultural, economic, political and social change but perhaps even more importantly in a society experiencing what were totally new kinds of change and this without the rituals and symbols to ease it through or around the tensions that such innovations inevitably generate.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in this chapter and as chapters two and three attempted to explain, while the extent of the differentiation must not be exaggerated, many of those traditional religious rituals and beliefs which formed an integral part of an indigenous

social psychology that enabled people to understand and account for their relationship to one another, to society as a whole and to the universe, though they still retained a hold over people had, nonetheless, been impaired by being detached from their accustomed social foundations by the cultural, religious, social and political changes that nineteen century political developments, including the already mentioned collapse of the Oyo empire, the advent of Islam and Christianity, and colonialism either gave birth to or accelerated. These changes had left traditional beliefs and rituals hanging in the air and when such separation occurs notions of and attitudes toward religion will be much more open than would otherwise be the case, to change, and more than likely moving, as Douglas suggests, to a more internal, personal understanding and approach in which ritual is used to spiritualize belief rather than simply as an efficacious means of achieving a desired end through being correctly performed.[25]

While the Mahdi-Messiah's concern with motive and intention reflected this development it also gave rise to controversy.

For example, his insistence on the need for intention, niya, to be present for both the ritual ablutions preceding the five daily prayers and the prayers themselves to be valid gave rise to considerable controversy, many Muslims arguing that the performance of the acts themselves was sufficient to ensure validity. The Mahdi-Messiah's response was to insist that it was the neglect of intention that had turned Ijebu religion into a meaningless, empty shell. He is quoted as having insisted repeatedly that, "although we have the Qur'an we have no religion" and backed this up by providing his followers with a "list of intentions" which he insisted were a necessary part of ritual.

Thus, for example, when washing the head prior to prayer Mahdists were to say, "O God, guide me your servant" and the ears, "O God reward me with the call of paradise and not hell", and so on. According to his followers the statement of intention gave them the sense that they were performing "true religion", the "religion of the spirit", as they called it, as

opposed to that fruitless, mechanical exercise of religion that they had once known and which others continued to practice. Moreover, this insistence on the need for intention singled them out in their own minds from others and, like their special uniform - the white gown for a man and the long white dress for a woman - and the processions, it contributed to the creation of a strong sense of identity and cohesion among members of the Mahdiyya movement.

A number of new rituals were also introduced with a view to strengthening the commitment to the Mahdiyya and obedience to its founder. The most important of these was salatu'l al-Mahdi or profession of faith - there is a longer and a shorter version - in the Mahdi as a prophet of God, which followed on logically from the founder's reinterpretation of the prophetic calling described above.

This profession of faith, recited at the beginning and end of every spiritual exercise, reads:

> "May God bless our leader Muhammad al-Mahdi, and the people of our leader as He has blessed our leader Abraham and his people over all the world; thou are praiseworthy and glorious".[26]

The alternative profession of faith, this time substantially shorter, easier to chant and a better instrument for arousing the emotions and creating a sense of solidarity among the faithful, bears a closer resemblance to the Sunni profession of faith, but likewise has no reference to the prophet Muhammad:

> "There is only one God and Muhammad Mahdi is the apostle of God"

Asked why these confessions contained no mention of prophet Muhammad the standard reply was that other prophets had their own prayers - Jesus the Lord's prayer and Muhammad his profession of faith - and these were the Mahdi's prayers.[27] Followers were, however, to continue to recite the traditional Muslim profession of faith daily for the advent of the Mahdi-Messiah did nothing in their view to lessen the importance of the role of the prophet Muhammad.

Other distinctive rituals and practices included the procession to and circumambulation

around the Mosjidi Zahir or Temple of the New Jerusalem on the principal Muslim festivals, instruction in both the Bible and the Qur'an, and a rite of initiation and a marriage rite closely resembling the Christian confirmation and marriage rites respectively. For the confirmation rite the Mahdi-Messiah, sat on his throne, episcopal style, holding his staff, with the Bible and the Qur'an laid on a table before him and, according to informants, the rest of the procedure was as follows:

> "The Mahdi began by putting a sign on your forehead, as in the Qur'an and the Church. He would then ask you these questions: do you believe God is one, do you believe in all prophets without reservation and that they are the prophets of God. Do you believe you are now before the Mahdi-Messiah and finally do you believe in Shaikh Mahdi and all the prophets. You say yes to all of this and you were given a tap on the cheek and initiated."[28]

Two aspects of this rite are worth noting. First of all, it had both a Muslim and Christian basis as did almost all of the Mahdi-Messiah's innovations and was thus in conformity with his promotion of the cause of Muslim-Christian unity in the New Jerusalem. Secondly, it made clear to all those who followed him that their leader was more than a reformer, being as it was substantially different from the initiation rite required for membership of the previously mentioned Islamic Reform Society. This latter rite contained no reference to Muhammad Jumat Imam as a prophet or Mahdi or Messiah. Then, all that was asked for was, " belief in one God, in the prophet Muhammad, the leader of all men and other prophets".[29]

This new rite proved to be very attractive, as did the marriage rite, members explaining that it gave them a greater sense of self-esteem and commitment. Another aspect of Mahdiyya religious life that appealed to many was the emphasis on punctuality, the Mahdi-Messiah insisting always that the rituals and services begin on time, in stark contrast to other mosques, but in line with the new attitude of the Christian churches. Other practices that gave the Mahdiyya a distinctive look included: the compulsory wearing of white by all Mahdists when attending the Temple of the New Jerusalem or processing, the carrying

during processions of the Ark of the Covenant of the New Jerusalem, and the use of the umbrella of authority and the staff of office by the Mahdi when presiding at public worship.

These ritual innovations, like the new doctrinal elements, not only gave to Mahdiyya members a heightened sense of belonging to a distinct, separate community but also of participating in the creation of a "new" religion which was neither Christian nor Muslim, but as more than one follower expressed it, "the religion of the spirit".[30] And not only did Mahdists themselves feel they were different but others were clearly struck by this new faith which was strikingly different from all around, as the name given to it locally -"the revolutionary group"- testifies.[31]

It was also different from the traditional kind of Islamic millenarianism discussed in chapter one where the preoccupation is almost entirely with the return to the Golden Age, with the search for lost purity, in other words with a restorative ethos. While there was also something of this emphasis in the Mahdi-Messiah's message, the retributive ethos was the dominant one: for his concern was more with leading people out of an unfortunate past and present to a more fortunate future than with return to the Golden Age of Islam, an "exclusivist" aspiration that could not have brought unity to the now pluri-confessional, strife torn society of Ijebu-Ode.

Social composition of the Mahdiyya

About one thousand local people, it was previously mentioned, gathered to hear Muhammad Jumat Imam proclaim himself the Mahdi-Messiah. It is not known how many of this gathering decided to heed his call and follow his path to the New Jerusalem. What is known is that the movement was eventually to attract somewhere between ten and twenty thousand followers.[32]

Initially the bulk of the membership of the Mahdiyya movement was made up of people who had frequented the Mahdi-Messiah's mosque at his home in Idepo street, Ijebu-Ode,

during the reform period. Among these were Muslim teachers, alufa, while some like a certain Tairu Salami who described himself as a native doctor, were traditionalists. Others came from the aladura churches and there were also a number of wealthy and respected members of society from the Mahdi-Messiah's age-group, as well as some small business men, soldiers and young Muslims enthusiastic for a more open, scholarly-based Islam. Women appear to have been in a majority, for reasons already touched upon in the previous chapter and which will be explained at greater length in the following chapter. Despite the few wealthy members the Mahdi-Messiah's followers differed little from those whom Ibn Khaldun wrote about; they came in the main from the lower strata of society. And whatever period of West African history, or ethnic group or context one considers Mahdists have always come from these strata. Mahdists in Kano province in northern Nigeria in 1903 were for the most part farmers and casual labourers from the smaller, poorer towns.[33] And Lacroix writes that further east among the Fulani of Adamawa province:

> "sincere faith along with the resentment felt by the lower strata (emphasis mine) of society toward the politico-religious hierarchy, explains in our view the reception that has greeted the Mahdis or envoys of the Mahdis that have appeared in Adamawa over the past three quarters of a century".[34]

And according to the official reports of the 1945 Mahdiyya pilgrimage to Mecca - the great act of faith described below - many of the Mahdi-Messiah's most dedicated followers came in the main from the ranks of the unskilled, unqualified poor who earned a living as best they could. Furthermore, a majority had received no more than a very rudimentary education and experienced great difficulty in adapting to the changing order of things principally for the reason that their limited schooling, while it did not adequately fit them for the new pattern of life, left them somewhat alienated from the "Old Order".

There were also a number of followers who can best be described as destitute and this despite the fact that Yorubaland at this time, as in pre-colonial times, was not only large

scale, long urbanised, culturally diverse and sophisticated but was also relatively wealthy. There was what might be described as the "ordinarily" poor and also the extremely poor of whom those suffering from blindness, leprosy and such diseases as guinea worm formed, along with elderly and very young women, the majority.[35]

Childless women were particularly vulnerable to poverty for although co-resident descent groups would care for their own members there was little provision from family or the wider society for people such as childless widows. Indeed, a widow or unmarried woman without children could experience great insecurity as a result of her lack of offspring.

Also among those more likely to fall into serious poverty were people living in small, remote villages where access to markets was difficult, refugees, strangers, young children whose parents had died and who might be accused of using witchcraft to kill them, and women abandoned by their husbands and left to bring up their children on their own. Although many of the poor of this kind might find help or gainful employment, it was often a very uphill struggle for, while begging was a legitimate way of obtaining a living, there was little else in traditional society by way of safety nets or public provision for the poor, whether one thinks of state provision or assistance provided by the traditional religion. To be destitute not infrequently meant being on one's own, although Yoruba society offered more opportunities for independent survival than most.

In time, the composition of the Mahdiyya movement was to change as it began to attract more of the better educated and the skilled - teachers, motor mechanics, small business men, relatively prosperous market women and the like - and this development not only affected its ethos but also its organizational structure.

<u>The organization of the Mahdiyya</u>

Very important to the early success of the movement was the support the Mahdi-Messiah received from the already mentioned age-grade (regberegbe) institution previously discussed in chapter two. Not all age-groups in Yoruba society served exactly the same purpose nor

did they all exercise the same influence over events. In Ijebuland an age-group or set was at first formed every four years - later every three years - among those who had reached the age of puberty. Each group or set was given a name by the awujale or ruler that marked some important event in the life of the society and became universal throughout Ijebuland. Thus, those born between 1889-92 were given the name "Egbe Obase" meaning: the Awujale or king with the elders of Ijebu-Ode in good faith entered into an agreement with the British to open up the roads in Ijebuland to traffic from outside.[36]

By means of age-grades or sets important matters such as seniority at public events and in other contexts were determined. Moreover, the system provided a link between the main social units of the kingdom, units which were based on descent, and enabled the performance of important and responsible tasks such as ensuring that the pathways, rivulets and roads were kept in good order. The age-groups could also come to exercise considerable influence and even power in the town as with time their members acquired respect and wealth.

Regarding the role of the age-group in the formation of the Mahdiyya movement one senior Ijebu Muslim, the late Professor Muhammad Abdul, who knew the Mahdi-Messiah well and respected him as a scholar although he was never one of his followers, explained how essential it was to the movement's success at the outset:

> "In Ijebu-Ode we have age-group societies and these are indispensable for most of the things you want to do. Whether a person is going to succeed or fail depends mostly on his age-group. Now when the Mahdi-Messiah started his age-group rallied round him because they considered it their responsibility to give him some backing because he belonged to their age-group. . .his own age-group at that time belonged to the wealthy and respected personalities in the town. Also the next age-group, the one below, also joined out of respect for their elders. So at the beginning many of those who rallied around him were among the elite of the town. Some of these backed out later while others stayed. His following was made up of a variety of people, some members of the elite, some middle class, some poor. . .you find all kinds there."[37]

Sufi brotherhood organization also influenced the Mahdiyya system. The Mahdi-Messiah as the Shaikh or spiritual leader appointed a number of lieutenants, some of them members

of his own age-grade, others of a more senior age-grade, to oversee the various different mosques that were founded in the Ijebu towns and villages including Ijebu-Igbo, Sagamu, Epe, and elsewhere. The representatives were known as khalifas and, while the Mahdi-Messiah was alive, their authority and influence were very limited. Where the movement differed from most Sufi brotherhood was in the appointment by the leader of his second or junior wife as his deputy, although, as previously noted and as will be seen again below, this was not a radical departure from custom.

Much emphasis was placed on evangelization. Each Friday the Mahdi-Messiah sent his representatives to the various towns and villages in Ijebuland to preach and distribute pamphlets announcing the good news that the Mahdi-Messiah had come to inaugurate the New Jerusalem. As the numbers of believers increased in the towns and villages the representatives would establish a permanent base there returning to Ijebu-Ode to report to the Mahdi-Messiah on a regular basis and arranging for their founder to visit and preach in their locality.

This initial confinement of his mission to his own kingdom conformed with the Mahdi-Messiah's civic millenarianism previously mentioned, his belief in a morally transformed Ijebuland as the divinely-chosen vehicle for the salvation of mankind.

The women's branch

Women were to play a vital role in the early development of the Mahdiyya movement and their leader realized from the outset the importance of assuaging their fears and granting them recognition and status. He began in 1942 with the formation of a womens' section under the presidency of his second wife.

At the first meeting of the womens' section the founder instructed his female disciples on the necessity of belief in both the Bible and Qur'an as the word of God, and on their right to worship together with men in the mosque. He then went on to dispel many of the fears they might still entertain as women as a result of their traditional upbringing. His

women followers, the Mahdi Messiah insisted, were not to believe in the notion of "invisible" husbands, for such did not exist. This was an attack on the traditional belief that "invisible" husbands pursued eligible young women with a view to "marrying" them. Furthermore, it was idolatrous, he explained, for women to accept "aso ikale", the cloth traditionally given to a woman by her prospective husband, which then had to be duely "sacrificed" by her to that "invisible" husband in order to appease him. He also told his women disciples that the belief that children have invisible counterparts who would invite their own natural children to play and then possibly strike them dead, was erroneous. Moreover, women were not to be frightened by the threats of the agemo priests who warned that any woman whom they saw in public during the Oro festival would be struck dead.[38] This address, much of it in agreement with Christian views and practices, constituted a very powerful attack on traditional, and certain Ijebu Muslim, values and notions concerning women and apparently freed the prophet's female disciples from much deep-seated anxiety and fear.

The Mahdi-Messiah's treatment of women was not altogether exceptional. As was shown in a previous chapter, Yoruba women were very powerful in politics, in the market place and in religion. As to religion we saw that the primary school teacher Sophia Odunlami co-founded with Pastor Shadare the Ijebu Faith Tabernacle church. Other examples of women playing a vital role in the establishment, development, organization and running of an aladura church or society include Christianah Abiodun Akinsowon of Saba Court, Lagos. It was her visions and spiritual experiences that occasioned the founding of the aladura society, the Cherubim and Seraphim.

While still a teenager she received regular "visits" in June 1925 from an angel who took her to "distant places usually in the firmament". Sometime later on June 18th while watching the Corpus Christi procession at Campos Square in Lagos she saw the chalice carried by the bishop transformed into a live representation of her angelic visitor. Then,

while in a trance, she was taken on several visits to the "celestial city" and taught prayers for healing and the blessing of water before being returned to her physical body. Meanwhile her guardian angel had sent for Moses Orimolade, Baba Aladura, who had been mentioned in her vision on two occasions and who at the time was preaching in Lagos and with whom she was soon to establish the Cherubim and Seraphim society.[39]

Christianah Abiodun and Sophia Odunlami were by no means exceptions; prominent positions were held by women in most of the aladura churches. The already frequently mentioned founder of the Church of the Lord, Prophet Oshitelu, from Ogere in Ijebuland, appointed his mother as the first lady president of his Church and on her death she was succeeded in this role by one of his married daughters.[40]

Women appear to have been particularly important where it was a question of interpreting dreams, visions and tongues, or where "divine inquiry" had to be made concerning such matters as the suitability of a proposed husband or bride for a member of the movement. In many of these churches a "prophetess of the spirit" (wole elemi) either took charge or played a key role in these activities.[41]

Even within the wider Nigerian Muslim tradition itself, although not in Ijebu-Ode, some women, including the daughters of the jihadist Shaykh Uthman b. Fudi whose role in the dissemination of mahdist ideas in Nigeria was discussed in chapter one, were given positions of responsibility. One of Uthman's daughters, Nana Asma'u, was not only a leading scholar but also held responsibility for the education of Muslim women in her father's household.[42] And once they acquired or were given some recognition and status, however small, women could sometimes develop their own role. Nana Asma'u, just mentioned, came to be identified in the words of her biographer as the:

> "sarkin mata duka (chief of all women) by captive women; as an uwar gari (leading woman of the town) figure; as a mother of the faithful by her peer group; and as a Shaikha (scholar) whose writings transcended gender by the intelligentsia."[43]

There were also examples of women in similar and even more elevated positions within

certain Muslim brotherhoods, although this was perhaps unknown to the Mahdi-Messiah at the time. Among the Muslim brotherhoods or offshoots of brotherhoods where women were accepted as deputies or representatives, was the Ibrahim Niass branch of the Tijaniyya which, from its base in Senegal, spread to Nigeria and other West African countries.[44] Another example of a Muslim brotherhood allowing women to perform the role of khalifa, or muqaddam, representative, of the Shaykh is the Senegalese Mouride brotherhood.[45] Interestingly in this case, and perhaps also in others, the presence of women in such roles has apparently generated greater enthusiasm for the more mystically-based type of authority, a form of authority which, it would appear, tends to become diluted where the leadership is exclusively male.[46]

In all of these instances, including that of the Mahdiyya, the leadership justified the right of women to act as the representatives of the Shaykh and initiate others into the brotherhood in his name by recourse to sound tradition or hadith. And the response of women was usually highly enthusiastic.

However, no matter how familiar the idea of a woman with authority and responsibility in a religious organization or anywhere else may have been, women were rarely if ever accepted as the overall leaders. One authority states categorically that the various sections or factions of the Cherubim and Seraphim society rejected the above mentioned Christianah Abiodun Akinsowon as the leader of the whole society in 1934:

> "simply because she is a woman."[47]

For similar reasons the Mahdi-Messiah's appointment of his second wife as his successor, while in the short term it caused few if any difficulties, was eventually to lead to dissension and schism in the Mahdiyya movement, as will be seen in chapter seven. However, until the schism occurred the charisma of the founder, examined in detail in the next chapter, and a variety of techniques of control, Muslim, Christian and Traditional, provided the movement with its cohesion and dynamism.

Techniques of control

Although, as already pointed out in chapter four, the Mahdi-Messiah was a modernising reformer who displayed great hostility to the beliefs and practices of the traditionalists, one of his strengths and part of his appeal was his retention of a number of traditionalist attitudes and practices in a society where, as Parrinder stressed, "mixed religion" had become an authentic part of its religious and cultural life.

Muhammad Jumat Imam was essentially a transitional figure, a man attempting to occupy the middle ground, a position between the old culture and the new. He neither forgot the past nor abandoned its ways; indeed he was highly knowledgeable about and skilled in the application of a number of much admired traditional techniques. Divination and numerology were the principal traditionalist techniques of control that he practised, although he also dabbled in fortune telling, astrology and even in the much feared Egungun cult, the cult of the ancestors. Not all of this was known to his followers who believed that his powers of prediction were, as they explained, a "divine gift". In reality the Mahdi-Messiah in this respect was an "accommodationist" seeing in such traditionalist practices as divination a means to enhance his authority and prestige.

However, it should be pointed out that not all forms of divination are equally blameworthy in a Muslim. Leading Nigerian Muslims such as Uthman b. Fudi whose mahdist ideas and jihad movement were discussed in chapter one, and the more contemporary Yoruba reformer Adam Abd Allah al-Iluri, did not condemn divination per se; only certain forms of it were repudiated as flagrant violations of Islamic belief and practice. For example, according to Uthman b. Fudi forms of divinatory control that were particularly reprehensible were those that involved a direct use of traditionalist practices: for example, the offering of a sacrifice to the oracular deity or some other prescribed traditional divinity as is the case with the Ifa divination system, the most widely known and most complex of the systems of divination in Yorubaland.[48]

Although he does not appear to have used the Ifa or any other purely traditionalist system, the Mahdi-Messiah practised a number of Arabic forms of divination including Yisabi (from the Arabic: hisab, computation), one of the most highly esteemed of the numerous Arabic systems of divination known in Yorubaland, and Khatt al-raml, more reprehensible in principle in that it can prescribe both the wearing of protective amulets and the offering of sacrifice, although the sacrifice can be commuted to alms giving.

By way of contrast, the former of these two Arabic systems, Yisabi, is essentially a form of astrological divination based on the numerical value of letters. By means of a mathematical process the diviner determines the meaning of the signs of the Zodiac. For its part khatt al-raml uses white sand spread over a tray on which symbols are drawn and then interpreted.

According to some of his clients and those close to him the Mahdi-Messiah was not only highly competent in both of these systems but also in dream-interpretation and in communicating with the dead. Clients of his claimed that:

> "he spoke perfectly the language of the ancestors and was extremely good at communicating with them".[49]

Thus, Muhammad Jumat Imam was not only the reformer turned Mahdi-Messiah, but also, albeit less openly, the traditional priest and diviner or babalawo whose functions touched so many aspects of peoples' lives from ascertaining their destiny, to staving off malevolent powers and the potential hazards of the rites of passage, to grappling with the forces of Nature and attempting to control them. And while his involvement in these "pagan" practices shocked some of the purists among the Muslim community it enhanced his standing with a majority of his followers, many of them sometimes unware as of the sources on which he drew for purposes of healing prediction.

Some of the latter, however, were required to draw on all of their reserves of faith in their leader as they accompanied him on the wildest and most ill-prepared of pilgrimages to

Mecca in 1945. This journey not only gave the Mahdi-Messiah the opportunity to display several of his skills, and seek wider, more international recognition, but also brought out another side of his complex personality, showing him to be extremely self-righteous, harsh and uncaring. The pilgrimage also provides one of the clearest of illustrations of charisma as a relationship founded on the faith of disciples in the supernatural claims of their leader, a subject which, as previously mentioned, will be examined at length in the following chapter.

The pilgrimage and the pursuit of international recognition

By 1944, two years after his declaration and after much public speaking, it was becoming clear to the Mahdi-Messiah that he was not going to attract the widespread support in Ijebuland that he had expected. Using the same explanation as the prophet Muhammad for his rejection by the majority of his townsmen, and referring to the gospel saying about the prophet going unrecognized in his own country, the Mahdi-Messiah began to berate his fellow Ijebu and to seek recognition further afield in the Sudan and Mecca. Therefore, on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of the Mosjidi Zahir or New Temple, the symbol of the New Jerusalem, in 1944, the Mahdi-Messiah invited all those present to accompany him to Mecca, an adventure that, as already indicated, was to test to the full the faith and endurance of the estimated two hundred of his followers who responded to this call.

This pilgrimage was to prove to be one of the most contentious ever undertaken by Nigerian Muslims, and also gave the colonial administration considerable cause for concern. The main reason for the furore was the death en route to Mecca of at least fifty members of the group, the majority dying of disease, hunger and exhaustion at Port Sudan.

This tragedy, attributed by the Mahdi-Messiah to the "serious sins" committed by those who died during the course of the journey, does, as already suggested, point up something of the depth of the trust his followers placed in him and of the influence and control he

exercised over them.

The pilgrimage began on May 4th 1945 when the Mahdi-Messiah, having been "commanded by God to make a direct journey to Mecca", set out from Ijebu-Ode by train for Kano in northern Nigeria accompanied, according to one report, by several hundred people, some of them very old, and all of them ill-prepared and lacking the necessary means to make the journey. They were carrying the Ark of the Covenant - the black box containing the Bible and the Qur'an and given, as previously mentioned, to the Mahdi while on retreat in the wooded area outside Ijebu-Ode - in front of their leader and chanting "Muhammad Mahdi is the apostle of God" and "There is no god but God".[50]

The pilgrims were received by the Emir of the old and large Muslim town of Kano in north Nigeria and were given food and transport to Maidugari further east. There the Mahdi-Messiah met and debated with the Shehu of Borno who according to the Resident's report:

> "was tolerant in the extreme to the self-styled Mahdi for he simply allowed him to continue preaching and made no objection to the fact that the Mahdi's flag was flown."[51]

Again the pilgrims were given food - a ram and honey - and also money to assist them on their way to Fort Lamy (Chad) from where they made for Khartoum. It was the Mahdi's visit to Sir Sidi Abdurrahman Pasha, son of the Mahdi of the Sudan, in Khartoum that gave the British government most cause for alarm. It was feared that whatever attention he received from Sir Sidi would enhance his appeal among Nigerian Muslims and among the "troublesome" Mahdists in particular. It would appear that the Mahdi-Messiah was given a warm welcome in Khartoum.[52] He was not only accommodated in one of Sir Sidi's guest houses and taken to the tomb of the latter's grandfather in Omdurman but was also declared in public to possess "the same Spirit as Ahmad el-Mahdi".[53]

Growing in self-confidence and self-importance the Mahdi-Messiah cabled the King of Saudi Arabia announcing himself as the Mahdi, advising him of his arrival in Jeddah and

requesting accommodation and facilities befitting his status. At this juncture a number of his followers were without food and other necessities and were thus obliged to remain in the Sudan and work, some on the cotton plantations others on the railways. Meanwhile, the Mahdi-Messiah went on ahead with the rest of his party to Port Sudan where more of the pilgrims stayed behind to find work. As already mentioned about fifty were eventually to die there from hunger and exhaustion.

Meanwhile the leader and a few remaining disciples pressed on to Jeddah where the friendly receptions they had become accustomed to during their now six month old journey came to an abrupt end when Muhammad Jumat Imam was obliged to renounce his claim to "mahdiship" in order to save his life. According to one report from the resident of Borno province in northern Nigeria:

> "This man's (the Mahdi-Messiah's) reception at Jeddah was exactly what one would expect if one landed in Saudi Arabia and announced that one was the Mahdi. He was forthwith cast into a dungeon. It cost him a sum of money before his repentance was accepted. It is also widely told that the sight of the public executioner standing near the qadi (judge) and wiping his drawn scimitar produced more money."[54]

Another confidential memorandum, this time from the British Commissioner of Port Sudan to the Nigerian authorities, also reported that in order to be set free the Mahdi-Messiah renounced his claims to prophethood:

> " The self-styled Mahdi was apparently arrested and promptly incarcerated on his arrival in Jeddah and only obtained his release and perhaps saved his life by confessing that he was not the Mahdi and had only claimed to be so in order to induce his wild and woolly brethren to accompany him to Mecca."[55]

After his "recantation" the Mahdi-Messiah was allowed to complete the hajj. He then began his homeward journey returning via Port Sudan where he met some eighty two of his followers who had remained there to look for work. According to the Commissioner forty eight were men - some thirty of them "agricultural types" -twenty five were women and nine were children, all "left stranded" by their leader.[56]

The Mahdi and one hundred and four of his followers returned to Ijebu-Ode in March

1946, having been, in the words of the colonial authorities, "moved on through the Sudan as expeditiously as possible", thus preventing a second meeting with Sir Sidi Abdurrahman Pasha.[57] The British government was clearly hoping that the Mahdi-Messiah would be "thoroughly debunked" by his fellow Ijebu on his arrival home and held responsible by them for the death of some of his followers in the Sudan and for the late return home of others.

In the short term this wish was granted; the Mahdi-Messiah's house was stoned by relatives of those dead or missing, his mosque remained empty, and influential Ijebu, both Christian and Muslim, accused him of gross negligence. For his part the Mahdi-Messiah refused to accept blame, went on the offensive against his critics and, as will be shown, recovered his status and prestige to become the leader of the largest single Muslim body in Ijebuland. We have here an example of the prophet as a creative, charismatic agent who, rather than allowing his fate to be decided by others, takes the initiative and re-establishes his authority. Clearly, both the standing as an international figure that his meetings with Sir Sidi Abdurrahman Pasha had conferred upon him and his new found role in nationalist politics as the black Messiah, outlined immediately below, contributed to the rapid recovery of that authority.

The black Messiah

The end of World War II saw an explosion of nationalist politics in south-western Nigeria, including Ijebuland, where the already mentioned Nigerian Youth Movement had been active since the middle years of the 1930s. One of the two principal tasks facing the nationalist movement was to create a united front out of a plethora of disparate and feuding factions. The other was to encourage all Nigerians, including Muslims, to prepare themselves for independence which meant, among other things, at this stage encouraging them to pursue a western education.

This independence strategy followed much the same lines as that pursued by the Mahdi-

Messiah in the religious domain and, moreover, the rhetoric of independence politics and that of the millenarian prophet was often virtually identical. Like the Mahdi-Messiah, the Nigerian Youth Movement looked to an imminent new dawn in Africa, a new Africa, a transformed world, a new society, a new kind of person, a rebirth, a regeneration and the like. But, nationalist politics were more polemical than the Mahdi on the question of Christianity's contribution to society, even going so far as to call for a "new Christianity" stating that in its old form it was "spurious and anachronistic". The Nigerian Youth Movement's newspaper, the Daily Service, commented:

> "Those who believe in the Christ of the Gospel believe in a real and not an abstract deity. Christianity is a religion of rebirth and regeneration with efficacious prescriptions for social regeneration. It must concern itself with every aspect of life. Nigeria yearns for the dawn of a new day and a new social order. But there must be a new kind of person if there is to be a new social order."[58]

This was the climate in which the Mahdi-Messiah, not for the first time but increasingly from 1946, spoke of the right of Africa to its own prophet. He would repeatedly tell audiences who responded enthusiastically:

> "If the whites and the reds(Arabs) have their own prophet the blacks must have theirs too."[59]

And he would ask about an issue that preoccupied many - the place of the black race in God's plan of salvation -:

> " If God has given Saudi Arabia its prophet, Palestine its prophet, can He not give the black people their prophet too for are we not also made by Him?(sic)."[60]

The Mahdi-Messiah also began to make predictions about the end to colonial rule claiming that "shortly" the British would be made to leave Nigeria. Indeed, for the first time he became openly critical of British rule claiming that present policies would lead to a sharp rise in basic food stuffs such as gari. However, these direct criticisms were rare, his emphasis being on the equality of the races and the worthiness of Africans to lead. This, together with his ardent pursuit of Muslim-Christian co-operation and his work for the development of an integrated Muslim-Western curriculum was enough to guarantee the

Mahdi-Messiah a positive response from many Ijebu of all faiths, and from emerging nationalist political figures such as the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a Christian, who was then active in the Nigerian Youth Movement and a visitor on more than one occasion to the Mahdi-Messiah's home and mosque.[61] But, in contrast with the politician who had recourse chiefly to secular, political means, and the Mahdists and Renewers discussed in chapter one of this study who invoked the doctrine of jihad, to bring about the new person and the new Africa, the Mahdi-Messiah turned to faith, spiritual jihad or struggle against selfishness and greed and prayer as the key weapons against the Antichrist.

Conclusion

There was little in Muhammad Jumat Imam's proclamation that was "new"; even his title would have been known to most from the presence of the Ahmadiyya community in Ijebu-Ode, and there was more than one precedent in south-western Nigeria, and even in Ijebuland, for the idea of an "Ark of the Covenant" and the use of the expression "New Jerusalem" to describe his future world of peace and harmony. Nonetheless, as we stated at the outset of this chapter and as will be shown later, particularly in chapter six, his revelation was perceived by many as both very different from anything else they had encountered and extremely radical: it expressed an integrated vision of how things would be when political and religious rivalry and competition were cast aside in favour of unity based on the fundamental truths that Muslims and Christians held in common.

This was strikingly different from anything current in Ijebu society at the time. It was in vivid contrast, for example, to the ideologically fragmented, strife-torn Ijebu society where the authority of the traditional ruler was neither respected nor accepted as legitimate, especially by the Traditionalists who had most to lose by the introduction of the "Sole Native Authority" system. This sense of disorder and disorientation was compounded by the division among Muslims engaged, as they were, in a serious and prolonged dispute over the position of the chief imam, and by the bitter opposition to the Tijaniyya and

Ahmadiyya movements.

Christianity too witnessed the growth of numerous sects splitting off from the established mission churches and then often subdividing again and again. And amidst this apparent disintegration of a society only recently regarded as highly integrated, no institution, traditional or modern, appeared to offer to those most afflicted anything other than its own particular, exclusivist message of salvation. Moreover, nationalism could not at this stage provide the answer for it was in its infancy as an institution groping, as it was, to raise people's consciousness of the need for political independence and hampered in its attempt by social division and by the Second World War both of which appeared to many to render futile efforts to construct a new earthly, political paradise.

In contrast to all of this the Mahdi-Messiah's message provided an ideology of change that looked toward a new moral and spiritual order in which individuals for whom, in their present moral state of being, co-operation was impossible, would be remade for tolerance and collaboration. Herein lay the novelty of the Ijebu-Mahdi's vision and it was this aspect of it that appealed most widely although, as will be shown in the next chapter, there were a host of other reasons of a more specific and personal nature why people responded positively to the his claims.

1. Adegbola, "Ifa and Christianity among the Yoruba", Ph.D. thesis, University of Bristol, 1976, op. cit., p.130 .

2. Walker, The Religious Revolution in the Ivory Coast: The Prophet Harris and the Harrist Church, op. cit.

3. N.A.I. (U.I.L.): Private Papers of M.J.Imam. op.cit.

4. N.A.I. Daily Service, op. cit., 9th January, 1942.

5. It may be objected here that this numerological evidence provided by the Mahdī rests, according to Maghribi reckoning, upon a misspelling of masīḥ as maṣīḥ.

6. N.A.I: Private Papers of M.J.Imam, op.cit.

7. Ibid. (This letter was composed in Arabic and later translated into English by Professor Balogun of the University of Ilorin and formerly of the University of Ibadan. There is a copy of this translation in my possession).

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. A. R. I. Doi, "A Muslim-Christian Traditional Saint in Yorubaland", in Practical Anthropology, Vol. 17, No.6 Nov-Dec, 1970.

12. Turner, History of An Independent Church, op. cit., p. 48

13. N.A.I.(U.I.L): Private Papers of M.J.Imam, op.cit.

14. M. T. Otubu, "The Advent of Sheikh Mahdi, The Promised Messiah, and His Ten Commandments", Ijebu-Ode: Araba Printing Press (n.d.)

15. Among the Mahdi-Messiahs's "treatises" are the following: Iwe Aniyan Ti Esin Otito Ti Islam, Ijebu: Ola-Olu Publishers, 1948; Iwe Odi Ilu Jerusalem Titun (Mossijidi Sahiri), Ijebu-Ode: Ola-Olu Press(A.H.1369); Iwe Ida Isegun Esu, Ijebu-Ode: Felicity Press (n.d.).

16. Interview with Mr Kuku of the Ahmadiyya, Ijebu-Ode, op.cit.

17. Sheikh Mahdi, Iwe Ida Isegun Esu, Ijebu-Ode: Felicity Press, (n.d). p.4.

18. Ibid. (See also: N.A.I. (U.I.L.): Private Papers of Muhammad Jumat Imam, op.cit.

19. Ibid..

20. Ibid.

21. Sheikh Mahdi, Iwe Ataohidi: Lati Le Fi Mo Olorun Kan-Soso, Ijebu-Ode: Odumosubo Press, 1951.

22. Interview with Imam Rashid of the Mahdiyya mosque, Ibadan, 27th March, 1978.

23. Sheikh Mahdi, Ataohidi, op. cit. p. 4.

24. Sheikh Mahdi, The Advent of Sheikh Mahdi The Promised Messiah and His Ten Commandments, Ijebu-Ode: Araba Press, 1954, pp. 3 ff.

25. Douglas, Natural Symbols, op. cit., pp. 30-32 and passim.

26. Sheikh Mahdi, Iwe Mimo Sabura Ni Ede Yoruba, Ijebu-Ode: Araba Press, 1955, p.35.

27. Interviews with Mahdiyya members, Ijebuland, 1976-78.

28. Ibid. See also: The Advent of Sheikh Mahdi, op. cit. p. 7.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. This number, based on interview material, is difficult to substantiate. However, many followers gather in Ijebu-Ode- certainly several thousand-on the such occasions as the anniversary of the establishment of the movement for the procession around the town.

33. Cf: Paden, Religion and Political Culture in Kano, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

34. P. F. Lacroix, "Islam Among the Fulbe of Adamawa", in I. M. Lewis (ed), Islam in Tropical Africa, London: Hutchinson, 1980 (2nd edition), p. 210.

35. Iliffe, The African Poor: A History, op. cit., pp. 82 ff.

36. Ayantuga, "Ijebu and Its Neighbours 1851-1914", op. cit., chap. II. Also: D.Forde, The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria, op. cit., pp. 15 ff.

37. Interview with M. O. Abdul 3/3/1977.

38. N.A.I. Ije-Prof. 4/1316. Shaikh Mahdi, The Promised Messiah to the District Officer Ijebu-Ode Province (sic), 15th June 1944.

39. J. A. Omoyajowo, Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of An Independent Church, New York: NOK Publishers International, 1982 pp. 4 ff.

40. Turner, History of An Independent Church, op. cit., Vol.I, p. 48

41. Peel, Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba, op. cit. pp. 164-65.

42. J. Boyd, The Caliph's Sister: Nana Asma'u 1793-1865, Teacher, Poet and Islamic Leader, London: Frank Cass, 1989.

43. Ibid. p. 49.

44. Paden, Religion and Political Culture in Kano, op. cit., p. 138

45. D. Cruise-O'Brien, The Mourides of Senegal: The Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971

46. C. Coulon, "Femmes, Islam et Baraka", (paper presented at the Anglo/French research group on Islam in Africa, London, Sept.1985, p.20).

47. Omoyajowo, Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of An African Independent Church, op. cit. p. 201

48. W. R. Bascom, Ifa Divination, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969. Regarding Uthman b. Fudi's condemnation of divination, and on the Muslim use of divinatory techniques in Yorubaland see: Ryan, Imale: Yoruba Participation in the Muslim Tradition, op. cit., chaps III and IV respectively.

49. Interview with a member of the Mahdiyya movement, Ijebu-Ode, 15th April, 1978.

50. N.A.I. Daily Service, op. cit., 5th May, 1945.

51. N.A.I. Ije-Prof 2.C.138. This file contains much of the colonial government correspondence concerning Shaikh Mahdi of Ijebu-Ode.

52. Ibid. Letter from the Governor General's office, Khartoum, to the Secretary, Northern Provinces, Kaduna, 26th April, 1946.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid. Confidential Memorandum No 47/51, 14th June 1946, Resident, Borno Province to the Secretary, Northern Provinces, Kaduna.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. N.A.I. Daily Service, op. cit., 27th July, 1944.

59. Interview with Mahdists, Ijebu-Ode, 1976-78; 1980; 1981.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

Chapter 6. The Response to Prophecy

The career of Muhammad Jumat Imam, the central figure around whom the Mahdiyya movement emerged and revolved, has been examined in detail from his days as a reformer through to his claim to be the Mahdi-Messiah and on over into the first five years and more of his prophetic ministry. At the same time an attempt has been made to show how his perception of his own mission, and his ideas and activities, helped to shape and were shaped by the millenarian milieu.

However, not all who claim to be prophets find acceptance; many are dismissed as impostors or charlatans or lunatics and so denied charisma; it is only, as Wilson argues, when claims to supernatural or extraordinary power or grace are given credence by a body of followers, that the one who makes such claims can be said to be, in a sociological sense, charismatic.[1] For this reason also it is important to examine in some detail why the Mahdi-Messiah's supernatural claims met with a positive response from some and why others remained unimpressed, rather than simply assume that he was that prophetic or charismatic leader that is usually necessary to give coherence to millenarian hopes and dreams which would otherwise remain unfocussed and ungrounded and, therefore, largely sterile.

Not only do leaders often see themselves in a different light than their followers but even among the latter there can be wide variation in their understanding of and response to their leader. This, as will be shown below, was as true of Muhammad Jumat Imam as it was of other African prophets including one of the most successful and renowned of them all, the Liberian prophet William Wadé Harris who, it was noted in the previous chapter, created, in the space of little more than a year (1913-14), a religious revolution in the Ivory Coast.[2]

Harris certainly understood himself and his mission differently from some of his converts, as did the Mahdi-Messiah. The former, for example, likened the call he received from God

to evangelise the southern Ivory Coast to that of the biblical prophets and saw and presented himself as the last of such prophets whose mission it was to preach the powerlessness of "fetishism" over against the saving grace of Christ. Yet, he was perceived by many of his converts as very much in the mould and as playing the role of the traditional priest, albeit one who had been converted to represent a power superior to that of the indigenous spirits.[3] There are numerous other examples from West and more generally sub-Saharan Africa where Christian prophets saw themselves in one light and cast themselves accordingly in a role to match but were not necessarily always understood in that way by others unfamiliar with the Christian religious tradition. Alland's analysis of the way in which western trained medical practitioners were perceived within the Abon culture of the Ivory Coast illustrates by way of analogy the point being made here with reference to how prophets tend to be perceived by their followers. He states:

> "No matter what kind of face an actor may wish to present to strangers, the image he projects will be determined in part by the preconceived notions of the audience. These notions will centre around the role system of the host culture. When the new role has an analogue in the host culture, the image formed will be found in this analogue, and the actor will be pegged into a previous existing part."[4]

Of course, there is nothing static about the perception leaders have of themselves and their role or the understanding converts have of their leader. In both instances this can and does change over time, and one tends to interact with and influence the making of the other. We have seen how Muhammad Jumat Imam enlarged his perception of himself and his role; from setting out to present himself as the God-guided one or Mahdi of the Muslims and the Messiah of the Christians, he developed with time the notion of himself as the black prophet. As to his disciples' changing perception of him, some initially followed him, they explained, because he was an upright man and a good Muslim, and only later came to see him as a true Muslim-Christian prophet, before going on to acknowledge and relate to him primarily as a black prophet, a wonder-worker and healer.

In the African tradition, if we can use the Nuer prophet as presented by Evans-Pritchard

as a model, charismatic power does not come easily.[5] Becoming a prophet may not only involve a great deal of listening and learning but also of time spent on building up a reputation either as a miracle worker or healer or in some other capacity. As to Nuer prophets they very often have to make an impression on people very early on if they are to succeed in attracting a sizeable following. This might entail any number of functions such as healing, curing, eradicating an epidemic, bringing rain or fertility, or, to use Weber's expression, operating as "warrior ecstatics" by cursing opponents or ensuring victory against neighbouring peoples.

It is with these concerns in mind that this analysis of the various responses, both official and popular, to Muhammad Jumat Imam's claims, is undertaken. However, before proceeding to discuss the question of the response to prophecy, some further explanation of what is meant here by a prophet or charismatic leader will be provided so that it may serve as the framework for such a discussion.

The Weberian model of the prophet or charismatic leader.

More than one indication has already been given - including the blind faith of disciples in their leader during the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1945 and discussed in the previous chapter - of the sense in which Muhammad Jumat Imam was charismatic and this together with other evidence cited below, leaves little room for doubt that he was very much a prophet in the Weberian understanding of the term. Weber defined a prophet as:

> "a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment."[6]

Weber means by charisma here, as Bryan Wilson has shown:

> "a quality not of an individual, but of a relationship between believers (or followers) and the man in whom they believed. His claim, or theirs on his behalf, was that he had authority because of his supernatural competencies."

Wilson, still interpreting Weber's understanding of the concept, continues:

> "The charismatic personality is, from a Weberian point of view, almost a contradiction in terms, and it is certainly a debasement of the linguistic coinage. It

> represents an insensitivity to the subtleties to which Weber was seeking to make us alert. . . .Charisma is not a personality attribute, but a successful claim to power by virtue of supernatural ordination."[7]

Charisma is a form of interdependence founded on an act of faith by a group in the supernatural claim of its leader. In Weberian terms, therefore, it is a sociological and not a psychological concept.

The charismatic leader as defined by Weber differs in several respects from the priest, diviner and even the African prophet as described by, among others, Evans-Pritchard. Beginning with the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard tells us that the prophet has indeterminate powers, acts in abnormal ways, makes sacrifice for himself and others to his own particular spirit and is feared as well as revered. He also points out that whatever their activities and powers African prophets are those who are possessed by "Spirit". However, since, in the Nuer context at least, all men have some contact with "Spirit" what makes some of them prophets and others not is the fact that, in line with the Weberian notion of charisma, the prophets have succeeded in securing:

> "wider social endorsement of their peculiar status as mediators between men and Spirit."[8]

But if their role is to mediate how do prophets differ from priests? Among the Nuer, as in many other African societies, there is no clear cut distinction between the prophet and the priest, or for that matter the diviner, for under certain circumstances priests may develop prophetic powers and become leaders of social and religious change. Where, Evans-Pritchard notes, a distinction does exist between the prophet and the priest and diviner, it is marked by the former's more direct method of communication, wider following and greater originality.

The difference, however, between Weber's prophet and the priest and the diviner is more substantial than that made by Evans-Pritchard and consists essentially of the fact that while the prophet is the recipient of a personal call and is commanded to do and say what he/she

does, the authority of the priest or diviner is derived from a religious institution or sacred tradition. Furthermore, the prophet, as depicted by Weber, is usually a layman, who is unpaid and stands outside the main religious structure. He can be required to give some proof of his gift of the "Spirit" and does so by divination, healing, counselling and the working of miracles. Through these and other signs he attracts his first followers.

As to the prophet's message, while this may take many forms it will usually provide:

> " a unified view of the world derived from a consciously integrated and meaningful attitude toward life."[9]

While, as noted in the above quotation, this message is "an attempt to systematise all the manifestations of life in the light of the need for salvation", it is also essentially practical, even at the expense of logical consistency: the charismatic leader is above such mundane matters as the rules of logic and where contradictory statements, like unfulfilled promises and predictions, might require clarification there are numerous ways of providing this. Recourse can be had to such explanations as: the statement was made, or the promise or the prediction, to test the faith of the believer, or again to the esoteric meaning of the statement or text on which it was based claiming that the believer did not fully understand its inner, hidden meaning.

Prophecy, furthermore, while it may demand shrewdness, tact, wisdom and empathy is not primarily an intellectual enterprise, and the prophet is seldom a highly educated person. Moreover, the prophet strongly rejects the clerical or priestly system where the canon of sacred scripture is closed and the era of genuine prophecy confined to the past; for the message of the prophet cannot be bound by what has gone before, involving as it does a new interpretation of old scriptures and if necessary the addition of new ones.

Committed by their role and message to break with the established order prophets, thus, stand apart in society as a potential agents of change and, therefore, are often regarded, not surprisingly, as seditious. They enjoin a new and different ethic - "It is written but I say

unto you"- new modes of thought and behaviour at the personal and community level.[10] The charismatic ethic and practice are, then, the antithesis of habitual or conventional behaviour, being as they are non-routine and resistant to the process of institutionalization. As Weber expressed it:

> "In contrast with all forms of bureaucratic administrative systems, the charismatic structure recognises no forms or orderly procedures for appointment or dismissal, no career, no advancement, no salary; there is no organised training either for the bearer of charisma or his aides, no arrangement for supervision or appeal, no allocation of local areas of control or exclusive spheres of competence. No standing institutions comparable to bureaucratic governing bodies independent of persons and of their purely personal charisma. Rather charisma recognises only those stipulations and limitations that come from within itself. The bearer of charisma assumes the tasks appropriate to him and acquires obedience and a following in virtue of his mission. His success depends on whether he finds them. If those to whom he is sent do not recognise his mission, then his claims collapse."[11]

On first impression the Mahdi-Messiah appears to fit almost perfectly the Weberian ideal type prophet. On the other hand as one probes into the nature of and reasons for his appeal he seems to contradict the Weberian image of the charismatic leader in that he evoked a charismatic response as the "author and/ or generator of order."[12] Moreover, the ideas and activities of the Mahdi-Messiah as presented in the previous two chapters in particular could at first glance be taken as confirmation of this: they point to him as a leader pre-occupied with mitigating the impact of rapid, even revolutionary, change rather than one operating primarily as an innovator. Furthermore, the Mahdi-Messiah's reliance on administrative and bureaucratic structures and his creation of a "clerical class" which included his khalifas and his deputy Shaikha Mahdi would also appear to set him apart from the charismatic leader.

In reply it can be noted that this way of interpreting events may involve too static a view of charisma for as Weber said of it:

> " All charisma, however, in every hour of its existence finds itself on this road, from a passionate life in which there is no place for the economic to slow suffocation under the weight of material interests, and with every hour of its existence it moves further along it."[13]

Not only is it important for a proper understanding of the concept to be aware of this tendency for charisma to turn "graceless", as it were, almost from its inception, but it is equally important to have a thorough knowledge of the local context in which the prophet functions, and this is especially so where it is a question of determining the exact nature of the innovative element in charismatic authority.

It is only possible to argue that there was little that was original or novel about the Mahdi-Messiah's claims, ideas and activities if these are taken out of context, and hence the reason for chapters two, three and four of this study. This is not to suggest that he was completely original; most of his "original" ideas, were, as we have shown, in the air anyway. Moreover, looking back it is clear that so much of his activity appears to have consisted of systematising readily available and often very similar currents of belief, thought and action.

This notwithstanding, what was especially innovative or creative about the Mahdi-Messiah was, on the one hand, the highly convincing, impressive, appealing and relevant way in which, as far at least as the Ijebu context was concerned, he interpreted Muslim faith and practice and constructed what many came to recognise not only as an authentic, genuine synthesis of the two rival faiths, Islam and Christianity, but also a synthesis that could save society from complete and total disintegration. Moreover, the realization of a synthesis such as this required the birth of a new type of person and to this extent the message he preached not only contained a radically new view of Muslim-Christian relations that if implemented would, it was believed, bring harmony out of chaos, but also a new moral charter.

Furthermore, although there was the Ahmadi precedent for this already known to the Ijebu, the Mahdi-Messiah broke decisively with the Muslim past, at least as far as many of his fellow Ijebu Muslims were concerned, demonstrating that he could not be bound by it, and if not by this past then not by anything Muslim. This fundamental break is evidenced not

only in his own claim to be the Mahdi-Messiah but also in his teaching, discussed in the previous chapter, on the "eternal Spirit" of prophecy which declared that the prophet Muhammad was not the seal or last of the prophets, at least not in the way this idea was traditionally understood.

Thus, although the Mahdi-Messiah may not at first sight and out of context appear to conform to the dynamic, innovative prophet of the Weberian type his overall aims, purposes and performance suggest a striking fit between how he actually behaved and what Weber depicted at a high level of abstraction.

There are numerous other aspects of prophetic or charismatic authority that Weber discussed, all of which cannot be taken up here. However, there is one that is of particular relevance to this chapter: the mental state of the prophet or charismatic leader already touched upon in a previous chapter and which will be considered again immediately below and when the responses to the Mahdi-Messiah's claims and message are examined later in this chapter.

Weber and prophets as "peculiar men"

Weber commented:

> "As far as we know the way of life of the prophets was that of peculiar men."[14]

And the pre-exilic prophets in particular were for the most part "ecstatic men" who above all else "heard sounds".[15] Some of them, moreover, Jeremiah being a case in point, engaged in compulsory speech while others fell into autohypnotic states. But this was not to their disadvantage for:

> "psychopathic states were valued as holy."[16]

Some of the Old Testament prophets expressly recounted such states, Jeremiah, for example, describing his condition as being like that of a "drunken man" all of whose bones trembled.[17] Conditions such as these, Weber believed, were at one time vital to the recognition and acceptance of a claim to supernatural authority:

> " There can be no doubt that these very states, originally, were considered important

legitimations of prophetic charisma. . ."[18]

There are parallels to all of this in traditional African society. Evans-Pritchard reported that initially it was difficult for the Nuer to distinguish between a madman or epileptic and a prophet, and in this Nuer prophets are not unlike Weber's "peculiar men".[19] Furthermore, among the Nuer, as among the Old Testament prophets, "madness" could enhance the prophet's reputation as Fergusson's account of Dak Dthul makes clear:

> " When my back was turned an idiot called Dak Dthul. . .was nearly killed by a thunderbolt which fell among his cattle. It appears he went off his head and attempted to raise the country against the Dinkas and oust the Government. . .Dak excelled himself by killing two Dinka boys in cold blood . . .He refused to allow his followers to take any captured stock, or women; and proved his madness by not only sacrificing cattle wholesale, but also by killing four of his own men. <u>One would have thought that such a succession of appalling acts would have sickened the people, but it merely served to augment Dak's reputation. (my emphasis)</u>."[20]

While it does not, and indeed in some societies would be roundly condemned if it resulted in behaviour such as that associated with Dak Dthul, "madness" per se rarely if ever detracts from a prophet's reputation. With reference to Old Testament prophets Lindblom remarked:

> " Madness when it comes from God, is superior to sanity, which is of human origin."[21]

In agreement with this, albeit writing of a very different context and time, Harrison says of that charismatic figure, the Cornish wine merchant from Truro, John Nicols Tom, who not only claimed to be Sir William Percy Honeywood Courtenay, knight of Malta and heir to the earldom of Devon, but also Jesus Christ, and who had been confined to the county lunatic asylum for four years (1833-37):

> "Whatever the verdict of the respectable world madness was not part of the popular understanding of millenarianism - <u>or rather, charges of madness did not diminish but only confirmed the truth of the claims of Courtenay and other millenarian prophets</u>. . .(my emphasis)."[22]

However, there are differences, as will be seen below, regarding the question of the mental state and in other ways between the biblical, nineteenth century Cornish and African

prophets.

Weber, the prophet and ecstasy.

For example, although in both the biblical and African traditions ecstasy and possession, are closely related to prophecy the relationship is different in each case. To take the relationship between ecstasy and biblical prophecy first. In this case, following Weber, the relationship had certain unique characteristics. And despite the various forms it assumed, from being carried away or speaking out in a state of trance to simply pondering long in prayer in a state of silent rapture or grief, prophetic ecstasy retained a distinctive character because, as Bendix, interpreting Weber, maintains:

> "It (prophetic ecstasy) was not connected to the traditional means of attaining ecstasy. . ."[23]

On the other hand in traditional African society, if once again for the purpose of this comparison we accept the Nuer case as the norm, ecstasy and prophecy are intimately linked, although the ecstasy associated with prophecy is, in terms of its symptoms, no more than a more dramatic, more heightened, more exaggerated form of that which any ordinary person may experience.[24]

Thus, while the African prophet must manifest strange behaviour, extra-ordinary attitudes and attributes to demonstrate the validity of their claims, over time these ceased to be important for the validation of divine inspiration in the case of the biblical prophet. For the latter what became essential was the ability to hear the divine voice. This was the foundation stone of the prophet's self-legitimation. Or, as Weber expressed it:

> "Ecstasy did not guarantee genuineness. Only the hearing of the corporeal voice of Yahweh, the invisible God, assured the prophet that he was Yahweh's tool. Hence the tremendous emphasis on this point."[25]

As to the importance of ecstatic states and miracles, these did no more and no less than tend:

> "to support their (prophets) consciousness as tools in the hands of God."[26]

Hence, in principle at least, biblical prophets had no need of signs to assure their listeners that they had heard the voice of Yahweh. However, notwithstanding this absence of signs, and often of miracles, dreams and visions, there were indeed clear indications of "divine" election, an unmistakable one being that an individual should actually accept the call to perform such a hazardous role. As Bendix states:

> "Unless compelled by a higher power, no man in his right mind would willingly incur the hostility of kings, great families, the established priesthood and the public by prophecies of doom that frequently identified the speaker with the merciless conqueror from abroad. Men who spoke out as these men did were believed to have heard the voice of Yahweh."[27]

This appraisal of the response to the Old Testament prophet points to one further comparison between Weber's biblical and the African prophet as depicted by Evans-Pritchard. The African prophet, although like the former a marginal figure and one who exhibits what Weber termed "cultural hostility", is clearly more integrated into the mainstream of the social and institutional life of society. As already pointed out, in Nuer society the divide between prophet and priest, or prophet and "political" authority, was not as wide as that between the biblical prophet and priest and the biblical prophet and ruler.[28] Such then in outline is our understanding of the Weberian model of the charismatic prophet. The model provides an "ideal type" to which specific instances may approximate in greater or lesser degree and we have made a loose attempt to show the extent to which the Nuer prophet, our representative of the traditional African prophet, approaches the pattern. However, the main concern here is to use this model as the framework for an examination of the responses to the Mahdi-Messiah with a view to determining from the perspective both of his opponents and his followers the basis of his charismatic power.

We begin this discussion of the response to the Mahdi-Messiah's claims to prophethood with the "official" responses and follow these with a consideration of the "popular" responses. Included in the former category are those of the colonial regime and of the Traditional, . Muslim and Christian establishments. The term popular is used to cover

all other non-establishment forms of response.

The Colonial regime and the Mahdi-Messiah

Although the colonial adminstration had little fear of the Mahdi-Messiah himself at the outset it, nevertheless, continued to be haunted by the fear of Mahdism per se, as chapter one of this study showed. Indeed, colonialism and prophecy of any kind did not suit each other. Evans-Pritchard noted that prophets in Nuerland were constantly denounced by colonial officials for their greed and ambition and:

"for being plausible and unscrupulous and charlatans."[29]

This view shares much in common with the French colonial administration's opinion of the marabout,[30] the Muslim cleric, and was one which Evans-Pritchard himself partly shared arguing that it was only an ambitious person that sought to be filled with "Spirit" realising the influence it would bring him. By contrast the last thing ordinary Nuer desired was to be in contact with "Spirit", even offering sacrifice so that it might pass them by.[31]

Its preconceptions and latent fears notwithstanding, the response of the colonial regime in Nigeria to the Mahdi-Messiah's declaration of prophethood was determined in the final analysis by principles which it regarded as essential to uphold in the pluri-confessional context of western Nigeria, those of religious liberty and toleration. However, although this was the regime's starting point it could and would disallow or ban an individual or a movement which it considered might give rise to instability or a serious breach of the peace.[32] Other considerations included the desire to avoid any offence being given to loyal and co-operative traditional rulers and in particular the emirs of Northern Nigeria.

Initially, there was no evidence that the Mahdi-Messiah's claims would constitute a serious problem in these or in any other way in the syncretistic, largely tolerant religious context of Ijebuland and he was, therefore, allowed to make his declaration after first going through the traditional channels. The administration did, however, take the precaution of opening a police file on him shortly after his declaration in January 1942. At first the file

is surprisingly positive in its appraisal of the Mahdi-Messiah. For example, it comments:

> "He speaks intelligently and is very calm in his activities".[33]

But the period of harmony between the regime and the Mahdi-Messiah was to be short lived. The same police report of December 1942 was already a little apprehensive, stating:

> " A certain number of Muslims take to him seriously. The Chief Imam objects to him. He is popularly regarded as an eccentric and is treated as such by Muslims and others. He is to be kept under close observation."[34]

This tolerant and rather benign attitude ended when it was discovered that the Mahdi-Messiah intended to take his message to northern Nigeria where the colonial government had always been deeply concerned to avoid anything that might cause orthodox Islam to feel aggrieved or threatened. On being alerted to the fact that he had sent letters to the emirs of the North the Resident of Ijebu-Ode was instructed by his superiors to arrange for the Mahdi-Messiah to be:

> "persuaded to desist from prophesying and made to realise that a Muslim Messiah who quotes the New Testament for his purposes is unlikely to be taken seriously by the Muhammadans in the Northern Provinces."[35]

We have already seen that after learning of his meeting with Sidi Abdurrahman Pasha in Khartoum on the occasion of the pilgrimage in 1945 the Mahdi-Messiah became in the colonial government's opinion:

> "a fanatic whose movements should be curtailed to prevent him acquiring a reputation that he could trade on at home."[36]

The police file kept on the Mahdi-Messiah becomes much more detailed after his return to Ijebu-Ode from Mecca in 1946. His preaching tours are documented and his opinions and claims carefully catalogued. The report noted, for example, that the Mahdi-Messiah began to claim that:

> "he could speak to any dead person by means of a secret power that he possessed and to refer to himself as the only king on earth. . ." [37]

Increasingly the colonial administration came to regard him as being of unsound mind,

stating:

> "Public opinion is that Shaikh Mahdi is mentally deranged and should be confined to an asylum".

And again:

> " Shaikh Mahdi is not right in his mind. He is, however, a fine figure of a man and of some personality."[38]

While many were puzzled, bemused and even at times amused by the Mahdi-Messiah's activities the description mad (Yoruba: were) was never used of him save by the colonial administration. The local people distinguish between several forms of madness one set of symptoms being continuous laughter and/ or crying, constantly behaving in a juvenile manner, talking incessantly, claiming to be someone other than oneself, normally someone more exalted such as an oba, chief or king. This constitutes that form of insanity known locally as "were elegun", the possessed mad person, implying that the individual in question is under the influence of an evil or hostile spirit. And to the extent that he claimed to be someone other than he "really" was the Mahdi-Messiah's behaviour fitted into this category of madness.

The term mad is also used of those with dishevelled, unkempt hair, who go about naked and speak incoherently and aloud to themselves in public, and wander around aimlessly and absent mindedly. This is "were onihoho", or literally the mad person who goes about naked.[39]

Clearly, the extent to which the Yoruba categorise behaviour disorders as mental illness depends to a large extent on whether or not the socially recognizable symptoms of madness are present, and the Mahdi-Messiah appears to have exhibited very few of these. However, although not considered insane, many regarded the Mahdi-Messiah as somewhat eccentric, a necessary "attribute" in a Yoruba prophet. What is meant here by eccentric behaviour is that behaviour which, while in certain respects unconventional, nevertheless, for the most part makes for a fit between the socio-cultural framework and the needs of the society in

question.[40]

Thus, individuals who, for example, are believed to be psychotic in one sphere of behaviour only and where this does not prevent them from carrying out efficiently their normal responsibilities are one kind of eccentric, but not mentally unsound. The Nigerian psychiatrist Asuni offered the example of a policeman who allegedly wrote to the head of state daily for a period of two years warning him of an impending drought, but who otherwise behaved perfectly normally. In Asuni's words:

> " He carried out his police duties well, kept himself clean and looked after his family."[41]

Asuni compared this behaviour with the policeman who claimed to have been inspired in a dream to go to Dugbe market in Ibadan city and simply sit there, solitary and inactive. Lacking a relevant message and a following, this policeman's behaviour was seen to constitute a threat to the wider society, and while the former was considered to be eccentric or mildly psychotic the latter was regarded as mentally abnormal.[42] Where they detected signs of eccentricity in the Mahdi-Messiah's behaviour both supporters and opponents were inclined to regard these not as anti-social but as a result of his close contact with some spiritual force or power that exercised an "invisible" influence over his behaviour.

As previously noted, the term "were" (mad) - local informants, opponents as well as followers, insist was never used of the Mahdi-Messiah, either in a mild or a strong sense, except by the colonial regime.[43] And the more he appeared to constitute a threat to good order and social stability the more the colonial administration moved toward a view of the Mahdi-Messiah as insane. As already indicated, this reaction is characteristic of the type of response Weber would have expected of a bureaucracy when confronted with a charismatic leader or prophet.

The Traditionalists and the Mahdi-Messiah

Although the Mahdi-Messiah shared certain things in common with the Traditionalists, including a common life style this was overshadowed by clashing symbols and rhetoric as the latter struggled to move back toward the past and remain there while the former preached reform for the purpose of preparing for the advent of a "New Order."

Questioned by the olorituns, the representatives of the Traditionalists, as to why he had given permission to the Mahdi-Messiah to proclaim his message the king (awujale) of Ijebu-Ode explained that as long as the principle of religious toleration was "an article of faith of the colonial government's constitution" he had no alternative but to license the Mahdi-Messiah to preach. He then attempted to rid himself of the problem by contending that the Mahdiyya was the responsibility of the Muslim community.[44]

Nevertheless, the local ruler evidently saw in the Mahdiyya a further threat to his position already, as chapter three showed, severely weakened by the opposition generated by the "Sole Native Authority" system. This led to several attempt to prosecute its leader for "disrespect" and "insulting behaviour" toward the king. For example, in 1947 the Mahdi-Messiah was arrested and brought before the local council and charged with refusing to bow in the presence of the awujale, only for the British Resident of Ijebu-Ode to then intervene to have the Mahdi-Messiah released on the grounds that in British law there was no case against him.[45]

This made good sense politically and in every other way for prosecution for such an offence as "disrespect" toward an extremely unpopular king might have led to a considerable increase in support for the Mahdi-Messiah. Moreover, the Mahdi-Messiah in his defence claimed that he was being persecuted on religious grounds, for his faith forbade him to prostrate before anyone but God. While in principle this was so, the refusal to prostrate was much more than a simple ritual rejection of traditional authority by an eccentric individual; it symbolised the increasing tension occasioned by the growing

demands made by the universal religions - Islam and Christianity - on local custom and tradition.

Notwithstanding their own rejection of the authority of the king in question, Traditionalists regarded this refusal to respect custom as an attack on themselves, as symbolic of the Mahdi-Messiah's rejection of all traditional authority and as motivated by his ambition to become what he claimed to be, the ruler and law giver of a new order.[46] Among the Traditionalists who felt most aggrieved by Muhammad Jumat Imam were the priests, some of whom in their turn attempted to have him prosecuted for violating the principle of religious freedom and toleration.

The Mahdi-Messiah's hostile attitude - sometimes less than honest- toward indigenous beliefs and practices has already been noted and in 1949 an opportunity arose for him to display to the full and in public his contempt for these beliefs and practices. The clash between the traditional priests and the Mahdi-Messiah reached a climax in that same year when numerous "pagan" converts to the Mahdiyya movement were asked to hand over to him their shrines, idols and amulets. The Mahdi-Messiah then preceded to burn them outside his mosque in the presence of a large crowd. Outraged, the traditional priests protested to the awujale accusing the Mahdi-Messiah of disdaining their gods, annoying the spirits of their ancestors and profaning the land, clear evidence of the continuing, strong attachment to the "Old Order".[47]

This time the Mahdi-Messiah was found guilty and offered the choice of one of three punishments: banishment, imprisonment or a heavy fine. However, he was to turn the judgment to his own advantage by presenting this verdict as yet another proof of his calling, informing the king that he would accept any of the punishments in good faith since all "genuine" prophets - Muhammad, Jesus and many others - had been persecuted by their own people.[48] At this juncture the awujale decided to shift the responsibility for the sentence to the native courts but here again the judge proved reluctant to act and the

defendant was subsequently acquitted and discharged, providing his followers with further proof that their leader was no ordinary individual.[49]

The Christian churches and the Mahdi-Messiah.

Muhammad Jumat Imam's decision to proclaim himself to be the Messiah of the Christians inevitably gave rise to strong and divergent reactions from the Christian churches.

Where the Mahdi-Messiah offended many Christian leaders was by his insistence that since he had been privileged by God with a more complete and better understanding of the Bible and the Christian scriptures as a whole than any other individual they should go to him to discover the true meaning of their faith so that they might enter "the Kingdom of heaven".[50] He even went so far as to refer to himself as "the way and the life", promising his followers that:

"whosever shall pass through me shall enter into the Kingdom of God."[51]

This was hardly likely to endear him to the Christian churches anymore than his letter to the local bishop and to the pope in which he announced his advent as the Messiah of the Christians.[52] The Catholic bishop responsible for Ijebu-Ode quoting Matthew 24:3 dismissed him as a "false" prophet only to receive a reply containing extensive quotations from the New Testament to prove that the time was propitious for the advent of the Mahdi-Messiah. He also asked the bishop to consider "the abundant evidence available that the Holy Spirit was his guide".[53] The bishop, further, was not to discount his claims simply because he came from the remote and only very recently evangelised town of Ijebu-Ode for, as Matthew 20v16 and Luke 13v30 foretold, "the first shall be last and the last first." The Mahdi-Messiah finished his reply to the bishop with the words: "Please note that a false prophet could not quote the Gospels correctly".[54]

Although the Catholic bishop of Ijebu-Ode remained unimpressed many Christian leaders and their followers, particularly from among the aladura churches, held the Mahdi-Messiah in high regard, as already indicated in chapter four. And, as previously mentioned there,

Muhammad Jumat Imam not only lived within a few hundred yards of the Faith Tabernacle group, forerunner of the Christ Apostolic Church, but maintained frequent contact with the aladura church and consulted its pastors on many issues including his decision to proclaim himself the Mahdi-Messiah and on this he met with "a very positive response."[55]

Moreover, prayer, healing and revelation through dreams and visions - central to the aladura movement were - were introduced by Muhammad Jumat Imam to his mosque which not only made for tolerance between the two movements but also made the passage between aladura church and Mahdiyya community a relatively smooth one. "Official" Islam was much less accommodating.

The Muslim community and the Mahdi-Messiah

By the early 1950s an estimated ten thousand Muslims in Ijebu-Ode had joined the Mahdiyya movement, then about one fifth of the Muslim population of that city.[56] Mahdist communities had also been established in other towns and cities throughout Ijebuland and other Yoruba kingdoms, making, as already mentioned, for a total of somewhere between ten and fifteen thousand members by 1959 the year of the Mahdi-Messiah's death.

The reaction of the Muslim establishment to the Mahdi-Messiah, while it highlights an actual contest for the Muslim leadership also sheds light on a wider struggle between old and new approaches to the standards, qualities and skills required for leadership of any kind in Ijebuland. And this competition was intense in a society where, as was pointed out in chapter two, advancement and status such as that attached to the office were increasingly things that had to be earned.

The strongest reaction came from one of the two rival chief imams , Borokini, an "al-hajj", and once a member the Mahdi-Messiah's Islamic Reform Society, from the Ahmadiyya and from members of the Tijaniyya order to which the Mahdi-Messiah once belonged. Borokini accused Muhammad Jumat Imam of attempting to usurp the position of the "lawful Muslim leadership" and orchestrated the stoning of his house and mosque

after the latter's return to Ijebu-Ode in 1946 from the disastrous pilgrimage to Mecca. What appears to have provoked Borokini's anger even more than the pilgrimage fiasco was the Mahdi-Messiah's denunciation of the Muslim leadership as illiterate and incompetent and, therefore, unqualified to guide the Muslim community. The Mahdi-Messiah, by placing the emphasis on literacy in Arabic effectively excluded his two main rivals from the post of chief imam. He stated openly:

> "Before a man can be chief imam he must be a good Muslim, free from all diseases, well educated in Arabic and know how to translate the Qur'an for the people. Because of his knowledge a leader is able to advise and govern and can command the Holy Spirit."[57]

Although how or why the "Holy Spirit" would heed the authority of the one literate in Arabic is nowhere mentioned, the Mahdi-Messiah by insisting on Arabic as a qualification for "commanding the Holy Spirit" was expressing a view widespread in West Africa that the value of Islam lay in part in the ability of its clerics to manipulate supernatural power through a variety of means, an important one being literacy.

The most resolute opposition to the Mahdi-Messiah came, as mentioned in the previous chapter, from the Ahmadiyya for in appearance at least the Mahdiyya was an attempt to steal this movement's thunder. The Ahmadiyya, it will be recalled, had come to Ijebu-Ode in 1929 and it was widely believed that Muhammad Jumat Imam was keenly interested in becoming the Imam of the Ijebu branch. This did not happen and a certain Mr Kuku was appointed to this post. It was the same Mr Kuku who, as previously noted, challenged the Mahdi-Messiah to explain how there could be two Mahdi-Messiahs, Ghulam Ahmad (founder of the Ahmadiyya) and himself. And like many another opponent he also wanted to know how the Mahdi-Messiah could possibly come from Ijebu-Ode. He finally challenged the Mahdi-Messiah to a type of trial by ordeal - a form of trial traditionally resorted to when there was a dispute over a verdict pronounced by the headman of a village [58] - by asking him "to produce fire from his belly in the presence of a crowd".

Kuku remembered twice counting to ten and since no fire appeared he declared Muhammad Jumat Imam, "a liar to his face".[59]

Elsewhere the form of trial of a would be Mahdi was different and could have serious consequences for either the defendant or the prosecution. For example, in the early part of the twentieth century, Sultan Ali Dinar of Darfur, in the West of the present day Republic of the Sudan, resolved the question in this way: a self-proclaimed Mahdi would be arrested and then given the opportunity to confess that he had tried to deceive the people in making his proclamation. If he refused the ulama, scholars, would be called in to determine whether he was lying or insane. If neither, it had to be decided whether he was the true Mahdi or a heretic and here the Sultan would sometimes take over complete responsibility and attempt to slay the would-be Mahdi. Success in this was clear evidence of heresy, while failure meant that the ruler was corrupt and that his time was up.[60]

Tijaniyya members in Ijebu-Ode displayed little immediate opposition to the Mahdi-Messiah after his declaration in 1942, maintaining simply that it was his disappointment at not being chosen as chief imam that accounted for his decision to announce himself as the Mahdi-Messiah. As one Tijaniyya member, speaking for many others, expressed it:

> "Muhammad Jumat Imam was the best candidate but was unfortunate not to be appointed Chief Imam. The Muslim leaders did not want someone who knew more than them. He was a good leader who knew Arabic and religion well and one who made many good reforms."[61]

However, the fact of his ambition was not sufficient in itself to convince the Tijaniyya that Muhammad Jumat Imam's claims were false. Like the Ahmadiyya, this brotherhood likewise decided to test his claim albeit in a very different way. One of their leading and highly respected Shaykhs, Sharif Ahmad, was asked for his opinion on the matter and by reference to hadith, the Qur'an and classical Islamic texts proved to his Ijebu colleagues that Muhammad Jumat Imam could not be the Mahdi as he lacked the attributes and qualifications, coming as he did from Ijebu-Ode, being born when he was and so on.

In the Tijaniyya view, then, Muhammad Jumat Imam's claim was simply an aberration resulting from frustrated ambition. However, he was neither insane nor incompetent, and while rejecting his claim, a number of Tijaniyya continued to follow his progress and teachings.

Thus, with the exception of the Aladura and to a lesser degree the Tijaniyya, the official response to the Mahdi-Messiah was hostile, repudiating his claims either on grounds of insanity or frustrated ambition.

The popular response to Muhammad Jumat Imam.

This response will be considered under the broad categories of acceptance and rejection. Such a neat dichotomy is, however, misleading for it will be shown that, among other things, the message proclaimed by the Mahdi-Messiah was not only regarded as relevant and timely by those who accepted his claims but even by some of those who rejected them. Moreover, it should be pointed out that in characterising a response as one of acceptance or rejection it is not intended to convey the idea that these reactions were automatic and unquestioning. At times it would appear to have been so, but on many occasions acceptance of the Mahdi-Messiah's claims only came after a period of questioning and inquiry, sometimes brief, a matter of days or even less, and sometimes after a relatively long period of several months and more.

The popular response and "the gift of divine knowledge"

Very frequently those who became devoted disciples of the Mahdi-Messiah explained that their leader had convinced them that he was in possession of the gift of "divine knowledge", and a number claimed to have witnessed this for themselves. As one expressed it:

> "I went to him and said 'you call yourself the Mahdi-Messiah. How do you come to say that ?'. He then gave me a lot of explanation from the Bible and the Qur'an. He explained much to me. I was convinced he was a prophet."[62]

It was not only his deep and seemingly unrivalled knowledge of the meaning of the

qur'anic and biblical texts - something that convinced people but also, borrowing a phrase from Ibn Khaldun, his "supernatural perception,"[63] or what they interpreted as:

> "his power to group numbers and words and to deduce from them such things as the name of God, of the prophet Muhammad and his own name, Jumat, which he wrote down and put it together to give Messiah. All of this was evidence of his divine gifts."[64]

For most of those that followed him this gift of "divine knowledge" could not be explained by the Mahdi-Messiah's mastery of the science of numerology or divinatory techniques. For them he was one of those "chosen" individuals. whom Ibn Khaldun described as being somehow liberated from the limitations of the organic body and endowed with the necessary subtlety of soul to ensure receptiveness to supernatural influence and who, as a consequence, was able to penetrate beyond the visible, manifest world (al-zahir) to the hidden, esoteric world (al-batin).

This gift of "supernatural perception", it should be noted here, would not necessarily have been automatically regarded in a positive light by all those who listened to the Mahdi-Messiah. As Buckley has shown, the Yoruba have an ambivalent attitude toward revelation and can be even more preoccupied with the possible danger from this than from that extremely ambivalent notion, secrecy.[65] The Mahdi-Messiah, however, had a reputation for honest dealings with his clients; he gave good advice and eschewed all negative forecasts and such harmful practices as casting spells on opponents or wrongdoers. And because "upright" and so endowed, he would clearly have been seen by Ijebu Muslims and even by non-Muslims in the wider West African setting as capable of manipulating spiritual power, and of controlling and transmitting such power for the benefit of others, something that was likely to attract many to his side.

This impression of the Mahdi-Messiah as one with an unusual degree of supernatural perception was rendered all the more convincing by the belief that was widespread that despite the fact that he had received no formal education he possessed such a profound

knowledge of the Bible and Qur'an, such a command of numerology, and such fluency in Arabic, Yoruba and English. All of this persuaded many that Muhammad Jumat Imam had, as he claimed, received the "Spirit of Truth and the gift of divine knowledge," and was, therefore, worthy of their complete trust and confidence. Many of his followers posed the following question, the answer to which was, they believed, self evident:

> "How could he know and understand so many things - he never went to school - but for the fact that he was chosen by God and possessed the Spirit of Truth?"[66]

And sometimes the same point was made in this way:

> "From where did he get his knowledge? He did not go to Arabic school, he was not at the university. He had a certain power from Almighty God. When he gave you the answers you were convinced that there was no other man who could do the same job."[67]

Many of those who accompanied the Mahdi-Messiah to Mecca in 1945 were highly impressed by his ability to debate with the Muslim ulama (scholars) in both Kano and Borno. In the words of one pilgrim:

> "All their questions he answered but he did not go to school to learn to read. That is what convinced us. From where, we ask ourselves, did he get this knowledge?"[68]

The Mahdi-Messiah's talent for prediction was also an important element in the conversion of a sizeable number. One who joined the movement in 1946 recalled that although he was extremely impressed by the Mahdi-Messiah from the outset he was reluctant to become a disciple until 1952:

> " Then my mind was fully certain for all the things he said would happen came to pass. The Mahdi-Messiah said in 1942 that the Queen of England would visit Nigeria and she came in 1952, as he had predicted".[69]

This former soldier recounted how his own conversion to the Mahdiyya was triggered by this and other predictions:

> " I was in the army in Sierra Leone in 1942 during the Hitler War when the Spirit of Truth came to Shaikh Mahdi. I was reading the paper. I read that a Shaikh Mahdi was addressing the people that a time was coming when -you know at that time in Ijebu-Ode we were not civilised like today- the King or Queen of England is coming to Ijebu-Ode. I asked myself what sort of man he was and how he knew that. He also said there would be a time when we will drive the Europeans away.

> That was 1942. What he said was fulfilled. The Queen came to Nigeria and we are now ruling ourselves."[70]

Others also had their faith in the Mahdi-Messiah confirmed by similar predictions such as that which foretold that the flag of an independent Nigeria would be green and white like that of the Mahdiyya movement and that the motto of the country would be, again like that of the Mahdiyya, Unity and Faith, and on both counts he was correct.

The Mahdi-Messiah's ability to predict was not only acknowledged as a divine gift by followers but also by Christians, even by Christians with status and standing in the town. Mr Otufale, a respected elder spokesman, senior citizen of Ijebu-Ode and pillar of the Christ Apostolic church stated:

> " The Mahdi told me my future in 1936 and it has come true. I do not believe in prophecy or fortune telling so much but one can know that he is truly guided by God."[71]

Local market traders recall the Mahdi-Messiah's predictions concerning the sharp increase in the price of foodstuffs such as gari and rice. One remembered how he foretold:

> "That the gari we are now eating which is enough for two men and costs one shilling and six pence would rise to five shillings for just sufficient for one man to quench (sic) his appetite. A tin of kerosene, not more than one shilling and six pence now and that would last for three days would, he predicted, rise to five shillings and would not last for more than one day. Those were marvelous predictions."[72]

Good character and true religion

While many who became committed followers of the Mahdi-Messiah placed great emphasis on his "divine gift" of knowledge and his ability to predict, to others what appears to have mattered as much was his "good character", and the fact that he was a "true man of God" who preached "true" religion.

This response was most common among the women members of the movement some of whom found the restrictions placed on their religious and other activities by Traditional cults such as the Egungun and Oro cults and by "traditional" Islam, that is Islam as practi ed by the main body of Muslims in Ijebu-Ode, irksome and constraining.

By comparison the Mahdi-Messiah was a forward looking fundamentalist. Fundamentalism is often interpreted, somewhat superficially, as backward and anti-modern.[73] There are, however, occasions when people resort to fundamentalism precisely in order to be modern, an example would be many second generation Muslims in western Europe, especially where such questions as what they refer to as "cast marriage" are concerned. They point to the Qur'an and hadith to explain that this practice is not part of Islam and should, therefore, be discontinued. In several respects the Mahdi-Messiah was also fundamentalist in this sense; his resort to the Qur'an was a method of throwing off what he saw as the outmoded and un-Islamic attitudes, beliefs and practices of Ijebu Muslims regarding women and worship and in other matters.

Indeed, although many of those who joined the Mahdiyya emphasised that the Mahdi-Messiah's message concerning the building of the New Jerusalem - that is, as the Ijebu chemist expressed it "a world in which there would be no wicked people and peace everywhere" - was crucial in helping them to decide to follow him, his "true religion" which included a correct interpretation of the Qur'an was also extremely important.[74] Likewise, the reforms he introduced into the Mosjidi Zahir or Temple of the New Jerusalem and his insistence on punctuality, an extremely radical measure in the Ijebu context but one which those with more regular employment found attractive, were also very much part of his appeal.

As previously indicated, many of his followers were women and the reforms already discussed regarding them turned the Mahdi-Messiah into a "champion of womens' rights" for according to a view commonly expressed by mahdist women:

> "He encouraged us to worship like men."[75]

Women were not only immensely appreciative of the opportunity to attend mosque regularly but also of the encouragement and assistance given to them to learn Yoruba, Arabic and English and to read the Bible and Qur'an. This was a major advance for many

of the women who joined the Mahdiyya were illiterate. For such women as these there was little need of miraculous proof that their leader was a prophet. It sufficed that he was:

> "a very good and balanced man who directed people in the right way. And this showed us that he was anointed by God and a prophet of Allah."[76]

The term "balanced" was frequently used by women to describe their leader and what was particularly "balanced" about his tolerance not only toward them but also to Christians. As one female disciple stated:

> "He preached the one way to Allah and belief in all holy books, that not to believe in the Bible as well as the Qur'an is not to be a Muslim, and he gave women their equal position with men in religion."[77]

Wise counsel and modest life style.

His followers generally, whether male or female, while greatly impressed by their leader's tolerant attitude towards Christians and supportive of his reforms regarding the education of Muslim women, also found him to be an able and wise counsellor. That he lived in a modest, unpretentious way was also much admired. Counselling sometimes took the form of interpreting dreams. The following words of one informant sum up what many Mahdists experienced:

> "If you had a dream in which you sinned and you went to tell him he would tell you what to do and by the grace of God you would overcome your trouble".[78]

While it was not considered a soft option - its emphasis on punctuality and the obligation to read and study the Bible and Qur'an daily being but two examples of the demands made upon followers - Mahdism did make life easier emotionally and psychologically. As a panel beater said of his mahdist faith:

> "It is a go-easy religion for it helps you to solve your problems. If you go and pray in the name of God and the Mahdi the problems of mind and heart will be solved."[79]

It was mentioned previously that the Mahdi-Messiah, although a person of some considerable status in the community, retained a simple lifestyle which was no more than moderately comfortable, and this too explained something of his appeal for such a lifestyle

was not only in keeping, as we saw in chapter one, with what was expected of a genuine holy man but also put him within easy reach of the majority. Muhammad Jumat Imam, informants would insist, had earned their respect and confidence. They followed him not because he was a wealthy man who had bestowed material benefits upon them but because he was a man of principle (emia pataki), someone who spoke the truth entrusted to him without fear. To be regarded as a person of principle meant a great deal more in Yoruba society than perhaps in other societies. Such a person was a gentleman (gbagjumo): that is one deserving of honour and respect because fearless and responsible, and one with a natural talent for leadership.[80]

The Mahdi-Messiah not only lived close to ordinary people but also voiced their concerns at the high costs attached to practising their faith. Some of the more serious economic difficulties in the way of practising religion in Ijebuland were occasioned by Muslim clerics who demanded large sums for performing such socially as well as religiously important rites as funerals which no one could neglect without great unease and anxiety. To counteract this the Mahdi-Messiah insisted that the imam who conducted the burial services of which there were two - one was performed in the home and one at the burial ground - should not receive the customary double payment but only one modest fee in accordance with each person's ability to pay. He likewise banned the wearing of expensive clothes made from "aso ebi" cloth on the grounds that the money could be better spent on the basic necessities of life and, where these had been met, on education.

While he appealed in these personal and practical ways - millenarianism like fundamentalism is often in terms of its practical consequences a this-worldly belief - the Mahdi-Messiah's reputation as a defender of his peoples' fundamental rights was also growing. The fact that he was a Nigerian and a "black prophet" who spoke about the end of colonial rule, at a time of growing interest in independence politics, also caught the popular imagination in ways reminiscent of Kimbangu and Chilembwe, among others, who

likewise made people aware that however hopeless things appeared to be, with divine assistance change was possible.[81]

An "ordinary" black prophet

Although in much of sub-Saharan African such "nationalist" prophets tended to be Christian there were also numerous Muslim prophets, a majority of them not unexpectedly coming from the heavily islamised regions of former French West Africa.[82] One of the more widely known examples of a black Muslim prophet in the post World War II era was the previously mentioned Senegalese Shaikh, Ibrahim Niass, from Kaolack.[83] Another was the Mahdi, Seydina Mouhamadou Limamou Laye, also from Senegal and, from among the Yoruba, Al-hajj Abdul Salami Bamidele whose movement will be compared with the Mahdiyya in the conclusion to this study.[84] Many of the Mahdiyya members believed, as already indicated, that their leader was an "ordinary" black prophet in the sense that he in no way superseded Muhammad or Jesus or any other "genuine" prophet. To insist, moreover, that he was superior to these other prophets was to engage in the same form of cultural and political domination that had been and continued to be practiced by others toward Africans. A madhist spokesman explained:

> "The belief that there can be only one prophet is motivated by the desire to dominate politically. Shaikh Mahdi has as much right to be regarded as a prophet as anyone else for he has done the work to prove he is a prophet. If he was not black and Nigeria had a written language of its own he would have a better chance of being more widely accepted."[85]

Mahdists were convinced that even those among their own people who rejected their founder's claims did so because:

> "he grew up among ordinary people and was black."[86]

According to those who followed him this obscurity and anonymity was one of the main reasons that made Muhammad Jumat Imam pre-eminently suitable for the role to which he had been called for, using the New Testament in support of their argument:

"Matthew ch.12 says a prophet is never recognised in his own country."[87]

This response points to a desire for an "indigenous Islam", a religion that people could identify with in terms of its leadership, culture and language along the lines of the aladura form of Christianity. The Islam which they knew, no matter how syncretistic it had become, was perceived to be in essence an Arab faith. Traditional religion, for its part, was not an option for it clashed sharply with "progress". The Mahdi-Messiah's way to the New Jerusalem symbolised in the Mosjidi Zahir, on the other hand, offered the surest hope of integration both personal, cultural and social in a deeply divided and confused society: it was the "religion of the Spirit" in which Muslims and Christians respected each other, worshipped together and believed in all true prophets whatever their race or colour.

By way of contrast the Senegalese Muslim leader and quasi prophet Shaikh Ibrahim Niass, already referred to above, entered into the politics of African nationalism with a short pamphlet "Africa to the Africans" which was essentially a claim that Africa could find unity through Islam, a universal faith that would overcome the ethnic divisions which hampered the process of African integration.[88]

There were, however, similarities between Niass and the Mahdi-Messiah: in both cases a majority of disciples were from the poorer, illiterate or semi-illiterate classes, and believed that their leader, although black, had been chosen by God to be the "holiest" person in the contemporary world and that through him the black race would be saved.[89] Therefore, for the followers of both Niass and the Mahdi-Messiah, to be a disciple of a distinguished black prophet was a measure of their own value as Africans and an explanation of their own role, again as Africans, in the divine plan of salvation: it was a clear sign that Africa had not been left out of that plan for its own profound and ultimate material and spiritual transformation and that they had been divinely chosen to carry it forward.

Both movements, then, resembled each other in that they were statements about the dignity and identity of Africans emphasising that, contrary to appearances, the continent and its people had not been abandoned by God. These movements were emphatic that there was

no need of a saviour from another race. Indeed, far from being left out of the divine plan or given only a passive role therein Mahdists belonged to a noble race and were called by God to help save their own continent.

This nationalist dimension in the Mahdiyya movement by focusing attention on the active role of the African in the divine plan, imparted to followers not only a greater sense of their own worth but also of their capacity for self-improvement. Furthermore, the identification of the Mosjidi-Zahir or Temple of the New Jerusalem as a second or alternative Mecca not only enabled the immense spiritual power and prestige symbolised by Islam's sacred shrine to be localized in a community distant geographically and historically from the source of such power, but also gave rise, as we shall see immediately below, to a strong sense of personal worth and feeling of self-esteem, among people who did not have and probably never would have the means to perform the hajj.

Making Mecca and "forgiveness" accessible.

For most Nigerian Muslims from the south-west of the country, the benefits of Mecca were beyond their reach. The forgiveness, the sense of solidarity and the status that could be had from undertaking the hajj were little more than a dream for the vast majority. By contrast Mahdists, dressed in their white robes and emotionally uplifted by the chanting of their profession of faith, could obtain a sense of all that Mecca had to offer from the pilgrimage to the Mosjidi Zahir.

Behind the Mosjidi Zahir or the New Temple of Jerusalem stands both the Mahdi-Messiah's tomb and a concrete replica of the Kaabah which together attract thousands of Muslims from Ijebu-Ode and other western Nigerian towns. These pilgrims visit the mosque on special occasions including the date of the anniversary of the declaration of Mahdi-Messiahship, January 2nd, "to make tawwaf", circumambulation around the Mahdi-Messiah's tomb and the replica of the kaabah. This ritual, it is believed, purifies the soul and is, "as nice as coming into the house from the dust and washing one's body."[90]

Mahdism, in this way, brought within the reach of ordinary people some of the prized spiritual, emotional, collective and social benefits of the hajj. But more importantly, it pointed out that the source of spiritual power which they needed to effect their moral transformation and bring about their new world lay within themselves rather than in others from outside.

Rejection

The form taken by the "popular rejectionist" response to the Mahdi-Messiah has already been touched upon. This questioned, it will be recalled, his claims to prophethood on the grounds that he was black and from the "small unknown city of Ijebu-Ode" and so forth. However, it is worth noting again here that there was a sizeable group of Ijebu Muslims, excluding the members of the Ahmadiyya who felt aggrieved that the Mahdi-Messiah was attempting to expropriate their message, that tempered its rejection of the Mahdi Messiah's claims by making a sharp distinction between what it considered to be his erroneous claims to prophethood and the vast bulk of his teaching and opinions on Islam.

Many of this group were among the better-educated Muslims and here we can mention the response of two of them, one a former headmaster of a Muslim College and the other the former Professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at the University of Ibadan, the Muslim scholar, Muhammad Abdul.

The headmaster, a university graduate, used to attend the same mosque as Muhammad Jumat Imam whom he described as:

> "one of the most learned Muslims I have ever come across. Even by today's standards he was really learned especially in Arabic and Oriental studies. He was regarded as a big (very learned) mallam (Muslim teacher). He even felt he was the most knowledgeable and found it difficult to accept when he was not elected chief Imam. That is why he started his own sect."[91]

Asked how people responded to his claims, and if they regarded him as of sound mind,

this one time Muslim headmaster replied:

> "Everyone knew he was learned. Moreover, we all knew that someone was coming sometime for we all believed in the resurrection (sic). Some of us knew it could not be Shaikh Mahdi because we knew the cause of his behaviour - he wanted to be a leader, and he succeeded. He was a very, very learned man and tried to modernise Islam by patterning it on Christianity. No! No one thought he was mad."[92]

Professor Muhammad Abdul who, as an adolescent attended the Mahdi-Messiah's lectures, likewise rejected Muhammad Jumat Imam's claims to prophethood. However, he also spoke of the strong impression made on him and others by the high quality of the content of those lectures. What also impressed Abdul was the method of the Mahdi-Messiah's teaching. He recalled that the Mahdi-Messiah:

> " would teach Arabic and teach it in the modern way. Because of this so many people would go to him every Sunday and learn to read and write".[93]

Abdul, therefore, continued to frequent the Mahdi-Messiah's mosque after the declaration in January 1942 without ever accepting the latter's prophetic claims. Others interviewed adopted this approach, simply dismissing the declaration as something of an aberration which could not be allowed to stand in the way of the gains, spiritual and educational, to be had from attendance at the Mosjidi Zahir or Temple of the New Jerusalem.

A "balanced" eccentric

There are a number of points of contrast between what we termed the official and the popular response to the Mahdi-Messiah's claims and the one that stands out and has already been commented upon at length centres on the Mahdi-Messiah's state of mind. The colonial authority, as already indicated, came to classify him as insane and claimed that the people of Ijebu-Ode thought likewise. On the other hand our evidence based on interviews with some seventy people - some of whom were his opponents - who knew Muhammad Jumat Imam suggests that only very few if any held this view of his state of mind. However, that he was "eccentric" is not in question for even some of his own followers confirmed this, although, as we have seen, his women disciples constantly refer

to him as a "balanced" man.

It is not the intention here to pass moral judgment on the colonial administration by suggesting that its diagnosis was superficial and motivated by all the wrong reasons. Because people around him did not regard him as psychotic does not mean that according to other criteria he was not so. Moreover, from what has been said about his frustrated ambition there would appear to be a case for a psychoanalytic interpretation of the Mahdi-Messiah's behaviour along lines of wish fulfilment theory: society has cheated me by refusing me my rights, so now I will succeed in becoming even more important than I would have been had society granted me those rights.

However, from a sociological perspective there is no evidence of insanity or madness and therefore the interest shifts from this to local views on eccentricity showing, as mentioned above, that while a degree of this is essential to charismatic authority this same authority is destroyed by either hyper-abnormality on the one hand or complete normality on the other.

All responses speak of the Mahdi-Messiah as an impressive man, tall, with piercing eyes, eloquent and self confident. He was also certainly something of an enigma and by the way he at times ignored convention - making use of the royal umbrella, refusing to prostrate before the awujale - he behaved as if he were above the law. Moreover, his references to himself as "King of kings", as "the Way, the Truth and the Life" and so forth gave rise to a certain bewilderment.

But if this were abnormal or hyper-eccentric behaviour and not simply mild eccentricity his followers would have ensured that the Mahdi-Messiah received treatment. In parts of south-western Nigeria when there is a case of abnormality or hyper-eccentricity in a religious leader, the psychiatrist Asuni notes, the leader in question is taken by his disciples

to the hospital to be "cured" and, importantly for our purposes:

> " when cured is no longer acceptable as leader because he is now perfectly well and normal".[94]

Once again, this is not to suggest that the Mahdi-Messiah's disciples considered him to be completely "normal", but rather as one who manifested the "necessary" degree of unusual behaviour. In this matter what constitutes sufficient and what constitutes an excess is determined by the followers.[95]

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show why the Mahdi-Messiah readily galvanised support among the Ijebu and why in a relatively short period of time he was able to create one of the few influential Muslim millenarian movements in south-western Nigeria.

It has also been seen that conversion to the Mahdiyya was not, on the whole, of the passive or mechanical sort: belief in the Mahdi-Messiah's claims was not lightly undertaken in most cases. People placed their trust in a leader because, although he was without any formal education, he demonstrated an extraordinary ability to comprehend and explain matters of the highest complexity. Moreover, they placed their confidence in a man whose message made sense in terms of the emotional, political and moral chaos into which their society had been plunged by the crisis of legitimacy affecting the reigning awujale. Their faith was in one who could guide them through the apparently unsurmountable trials and difficulties of life.

This study of response to prophecy, furthermore, has not only pointed up the similarities between Weber's ideal type prophet and Muhammad Jumat Imam but has also attempted to make clear the extent to which the movement he founded was dependent on his charisma. This dependency will become even more obvious in the next chapter on the expansion of the Mahdiyya prior to the schism following on the death of the Mahdi-Messiah in 1959 and the process of institutionalization that it underwent from that date.

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2. Walker, The Religious Revolution in the Ivory Coast: The Prophet Harris and the Harrist Church, op. cit.

3. Ibid. p. 155.

4. A. Alland Jnr, "Native Therapists and Western Medical Practitioners among the Abron of the Ivory Coast", in Transactions of the New York Academy of Science, 26 (6) 1964, p. 714.

5. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Nuer Religion, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956.

6. M. Weber, The Sociology of Religion, (trans. E. Fischoff with an introduction by T. Parsons), Boston: Beacon Pres, 1963 p. 46.

7. Wilson, The Noble Savages, op. cit., p. 7.

8. Citation from: T. O. Beidelman: "Nuer Priests and Prophets: Charisma, Authority, and Power among the Nuer", in The Translation of Culture, (ed.) T. O. Beidelman, London: Tavistock 1971 p. 389.

9. Weber, The Sociology of Religion, op. cit., p. 59.

10. Wilson, The Noble Savages, op. cit., pp. 9 ff.

11. W. G. Runciman (ed), Weber: Selections in Translation, (trans by E. Matthews), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978 p. 227

12. E. Shils, "Charisma, Order and Status," in American Sociological Review, 30 (April 1965) pp. 199-213.

13. Runciman, Weber: Selections, op. cit. p. 235.

14. M. Weber, Ancient Judaism, Glencoe, ILL.: The Free Press, 1952, p. 286.

15. Ibid. p. 287.

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19. Evans-Pritchard, Nuer Religion, op. cit., p. 44.

20. Citation from: Beidelman, "Nuer Priests and Prophets", in The Translation of Culture, op. cit., pp. 394-95.

21. G. Lindblom, Prophecy in Ancient Israel, Oxford: Blackwell, 1963, p. 28

22. J. F. C. Harrison, The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979 p. 215.

23. Bendix, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait, op. cit. p. 245.

24. Beidelman, Nuer Priests and Prophets, op. cit., pp. 391-92.

25. Weber, Ancient Judaism, op. cit., p. 293.

26. Bendix, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait, op. cit., p. 245.

27. Bendix, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait, op. cit., pp. 246-47.

28. On the overlap between a) Nuer prophet and priest and b) prophet and ruler see: Beidelman, Nuer Prophet and Priest, op. cit; pp. 399 ff. On Weber the Old Testament prophet and priest and politician see: Bendix, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait, op. cit. pp. 246 ff.

29. Evans-Pritchard, Nuer Religion, op. cit., p. 307.

30. Cf: Clarke, West Africa and Islam, op. cit., pp. 184 ff

31. Evans-Pritchard, Nuer Religion, p. 307.

32. Cf: Clarke, West Africa and Christianity, op. cit., pp. 236 ff.

33. N.A.I. Ije-Prof. 2.C.138 (Government correspondence regarding Shaikh Mahdi, op. cit: Assistant Commissioner of Police, Ijebu-Ode to the Resident, Ijebu Province)

34. Ibid. Assistant Commissioner of Police, Ijebu-Ode to the Resident, Ijebu Province, 14th November, 1942.

35. Ibid. The Secretary of the Western Provinces to the Resident, Ijebu Province, 5th Dec.1945.

36. Ibid. The Secretary, Northern Provinces, Kaduna, to the Chief Secretary to the Government, 23rd Nov. 1945.

37. Ibid. Assistant Superintendent, Nigerian Police, to the Resident, Ijebu Province, 12th Nov.1946.

38. Ibid.

39. W. R. Bascom, "Social Status, Wealth and Individual Differences among the Yoruba", American Anthropologist, No. 53, 1951, pp.493 ff.

40. Interview with the psychiatrist Professor T. O. Asuni, Ibadan, 10th May, 1978.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. This information is derived from Interviews with Ijebu Mahdists, orthodox Muslims and members of the aladura churches who knew the Mahdi-Messiah, 1976-78; Aug/Sept 1979; Aug/ Sept 1980; Aug/Sept 1981. See also for relevant material on the Yoruba and mental illness: A. Kiev (ed), Magic, Faith and Healing, New York: The Free Press, 1964 and T. O. Asuni, "Socio-Medical Problems of Religious Converts," in Psychopathologie Africaine, 1973, vol.IX,2, pp. 223-236. Id., "Religious conversion and psychosis," in International Mental health Research Newsletter, Vol.IX, No. 1, 1967.

44. N.A.I. (U.I.L.): The Private Papers of M. J. Imam op. cit. Also: interviews with the chief imam of Ijebu-Ode and Al-Hajj Eleri the first and oldest living disciple of the Mahdi Messiah, Ijebu-Ode, 9th January 1976.

45. N.A.I. Ije.Prof., 2.C.138 op.cit: the Resident, Ijebu Province, to the Awujale, 10th August, 1947.

46. Interview material, Ijebuland, 1976-78; 1980-81.

47. M. O. Ogundunsin, "Mahdism in Islam with special reference to the Mahdi of Ijebu-Ode", (Dissertation for the B.A. Religious Studies, University of Ibadan 1968)

48. Ibid. p. 20.

49. Ibid.

50. N.A.I. (U.I.L): The Private Papers of M. J. Imam, op.cit. It is worth noting that Christian leaders including the Catholic bishop of Ijebu-Ode and the bishop of the African Church in Ijebu-Ode, among others, dismissed as insulting the Mahdi-Messiah's idea that Christians should go to him to discover the true meaning of their own faith. Of course, in advocating this manner of action Muhammad Jumat Imam was following Muslim practice.

51. N.A.I. (U.I.L): The Private Papers of M. J. Imam op.cit.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Interview with Pastor Shadare Sesebe, Ijebu-Ode, 7th April, 1978.

56. This estimate was given by the late Ijebu Muslim scholar M. O. A. Abdul, among others, in an interview with the author at Ibadan, 3rd March, 1977.

57. N.A.I. (U.I.L): Private Papers of M. J. Imam, op.cit.

58. Forde, The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria, op. cit., p. 52.

59. Interview with Mr. Kuku, 22nd October, 1977.

60. Cf. A. Christellow, "The Yan Tatsine Disturbances. . .", op. cit., p. 78.

61. Ibid.

62. Interview with the mahdist Al-Hajj Raji, Ibadan, 22nd June 1977.

63. Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, (tr.from the Arabic by F. Rosenthal and edited and abridged by N. J. Dawood), op. cit., pp. 70 ff.

64. Interview with Al-Hajj Raji, Ibadan, 22nd June ,1977.

65. A. D. Buckley, Yoruba Medicine, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1985 pp. 133 ff.

66. Interview with the Mahdist, Al-Hajj Yusuf, Ife, 30th April, 1981.

67. Interview with Mahdist Al-Hajj Rufai, Ijebu-Igbo, 23rd April, 1981.

68. Interview with Mahdist Al-Hajj Eleri, Ijebu-Ode, April 5th, 1981.

69. Interview with a mahdist and former soldier in the West African Frontier Force, Ijebu-Ode 28th April, 1980.

70. Ibid.

71. Interview with Mr Otufale, Ijebu-Ode, 25th June, 1977.

72. Interview with the chief imam of the Mahdiyya, Ijebu-Ode, 8th May, 1977.

73. L. Caplan (ed), Studies in Religious Fundamentalism, Basingstoke and London: MacMillan, 1987.

74. Interview with mahdist Al-Hajj Yinusa, Ijebu-Igbo, 12th May, 1978.

75. Collective interview with ten women members of the Mahdiyya, Ijebu-Ode, 30th April, 1980.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid.

79. Interview with Mahdist Mr Abdul Fasasi, 23rd April, 1978.

80. W. R. Bascom, "Social Status, Wealth and Individual Differences among the Yoruba," American Anthropologist op.cit., pp. 492-93.

81. T. Hodgkin, Nationalism in Colonial Africa, London: F. Muller, 1956, chap.3, pp. 93 ff.

82. C. Harrison, France and Islam in West Africa, 1860-1960, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

83. M. Hiskett, "The Community of Grace and Its Opponents, The Rejectors: A Debate about Theology and Mysticism in Muslim West Africa with special reference as to its Hausa expression", in African Language Studies, XVII, 1980 pp.99 ff.

84. A. Sylla and H. Gaye, Le Mahdi Seydina Mouhamadou Limamou Laye Du Sénégal, Dakar (no date and no publishing house given).

85. Interview with the chief imam of the Mahdiyya mosque Ibadan, 7th June, 1978.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

88. Hiskett, "The Community of Grace and the Rejectors..", op. cit., p. 109.

89. Ibid., p. 109.

90. Interview with mahdist Mr Arowasikila, Ijebu-Ode, 15th May, 1978.

91. Interview Mr Sanni, Ijebu-Ode, 27th May, 1978.

92. Ibid.

93. Interview with M. O. A. Abdul, Ibadan, 3rd March, 1977.

94. Interview with Professor Asuni, Ibadan, op.cit.

95. Ibid.

Chapter 7: Expansion, Schism and the Routinization of Charisma

On January 3rd 1959 the Mahdi-Messiah told a general gathering of the Mahdiyya community:

"The time is near for me to return to my Lord."[1]

Although he died soon afterwards on February 17th 1959 at the age of sixty three, Muhammad Jumat Imam continued to impress his followers with his "divine gifts", and in particular those of "divine knowledge" and "supernatural insight" until the last. Nor did death herald the end of his mission, influence and power. In a manner akin to the role played by the ancestors in traditional Yoruba religion the Mahdi-Messiah continued his rule from the grave, watching over and protecting the movement he founded and serving as the model and source of inspiration for the leaders that followed him.[2] The nature of the posthumous authority and power of the Mahdi-Messiah over the Mahdiyya community will be touched upon again below.

Meanwhile, to complete the historical section of this study, it remains to trace the expansion of the movement from the time of the ill-fated pilgrimage of 1945 discussed in chapter five up to and until the time of the Mahdi-Messiah's death in 1959 when between ten and twenty thousand people came to count themselves among the disciples of this self proclaimed Muslim-Christian prophet, the vast majority of them citizens of Ijebu-Ode.

An account of the schism that occurred soon after the Mahdi-Messiah's death will complete this historical survey and will serve in turn as the framework for an examination of the process of the routinization of charisma in the Mahdiyya movement, a process which began very early on in the life of the movement and reached its height at the moment of succession, a moment of profound disequilibrium and crisis for any charismatic movement. The problem of the succession may be at least partially resolved where there is a belief in the idea of hereditary charisma as is the case, for example, among the Ismaili Khojas,[3] or by the leader appointing a successor. This last mentioned strategy was the one adopted,

by the Mahdi-Messiah and it was to fail due, as will be seen below, to problems associated with gender and religious authority and gender and inheritance.

From the transformation of charisma the chapter moves on to investigate the changes in the Mahdists' way of looking at the world, and their altered perceptions of the Mahdi-Messiah's role and of mission. Whereas in the 1940s the principal "causes" of good and evil in the world were crystal clear and the most cherished of virtues were unquestioning faith in the Mahdi-Messiah as the one with a remedy for the world's salvation, by the late 1950s and early 1960s confidence was high in the ability of indigenous politicians, educated in the western system, to save Nigeria and Africa. By October 1960 independence had been achieved and in the euphoric atmosphere of the time people's attention turned away from ideas of gloom and catastrophe to the advent of that secular utopia promised by the politicians now that the political kingdom had been won. In this context certain mahdist ideas seemed old fashioned and pessimistic, and even parochial, for despite its leader's pursuit of national and international recognition, the Mahdiyya remained up to 1960 essentially an Ijebu phenomenon, only becoming after his death and as a result of the pilgrimage to his tomb, a somewhat more ethnically diverse movement. However, on one issue of great significance for nation building his teaching remained acutely relevant: Muslim-Christian relations. All realised, politician and prophet alike, that a major danger to the establishment of a nation state of prosperity, peace and plenty was religious strife. Thus, although the Mahdiyya in terms of its ethnic composition was to remain essentially an Ijebu movement, the ideal which it proclaimed of a New Jerusalem in which Christians and Muslims made the truths from the Bible and the Qur'an which they shared in common the foundation of their faith and morals and united in worship on this basis, was to remain a national goal of great import.

<u>The Mahdiyya (1945-59): an Ijebu movement</u>

Many of the Mahdi-Messiah's followers, not surprisingly, came from the capital of

Ijebuland, Ijebu-Ode, for it was there that the effects of the crisis of royal legitimacy that undermined the authority of the awujale, Daniel Adesanya, were most acutely felt, as were those resulting from the leadership crisis in the Muslim community and from the advent of the new dispensation that came with colonialism, particularly the moral, religious and educational effects of that order. It was in Ijebu-Ode, furthermore, that the millenarian climate of ideas and expectations created by Ahmadis, Tijanis, Aladura and Watchtower prophecies, World War II, more commonly known locally as "Hitler's War" - and nationalism, were most tangible and intense. The rest of the membership was scattered throughout Ijebuland and south-western Nigeria in towns such as Ijebu-Igbo, Epe, Shagamu, Abeokuta, Lagos, Ife and Ibadan.[4]

The Mahdi-Messiah built up his movement with the co-operation of his second wife Shaikha Mahdi who had attracted a considerable number of women disciples. He was also assisted by his khalifas or representatives in the various towns and villages where the movement had been established. A number of the khalifas, it is worth noting again here, were of the same age-grade (regberegbe) as the Mahdi-Messiah and this was clearly a very great advantage, for this traditional institution forged bonds of solidarity between members that were as tight as those formed by membership of the same religion. Also, it provided an organizational model familiar to all with the equivalent of a president in charge assisted by a deputy president or chairperson, a secretary and a treasurer.

Although he later sought recognition on a much wider scale - as far a field as Khartoum and even the Vatican - the Mahdi-Messiah's principal aim was to implement the task he believed had been confided to him by God and set out in the book of Deuteronomy 19v7:

> "I command you, therefore: You are to set aside three cities and provided you observe all the commandments. . .then to those three cities you will add three more."[5]

The three cities the Mahdi-Messiah focused his attention upon were Ijebu-Ode, Abeokuta, and Ibadan, which he hoped to turn into Mahdiyya strongholds.[6] He also looked to and

expected strong support from Lagos and Ife. In every case he failed for the Mahdiyya never became the dominant Muslim community in any of these towns. And those whom it attracted in Abeokuta, Lagos, Ife and Ibadan were in the main migrant Ijebu from Ijebu-Ode, capital of Ijebuland, who had made their way to these towns to trade or find work and usually settled among their fellow Ijebu in the Ijebu-quarter of the city in question.

As to Ijebuland itself, the areas where the Mahdiyya seems to have prospered most were those in closest touch with the centre of the community in Ijebu-Ode. This is not surprising when the decentralised character of the kingdom of Ijebuland is taken into consideration, and the relative weakness of agnatic links.[7] Among the more successful of the outlying Mahdiyya communities were those at Oke-Eri, six miles to the north of Ijebu-Ode, at Ijebu-Igbo, fifteen miles to the north-east, at Shagamu twenty miles due south, and at Epe, thirty five miles to the south-west of Ijebu-Ode. These communities differed somewhat from each other in a number of respects including size of membership, the socio-economic and educational background of members, and the degree of syncretism tolerated by the leadership.

To take syncretism as an example, while the Mahdists in Ijebu-Ode, Ibadan and in general in the urban centres unequivocally condemn and even expel anyone who engages in such traditional practices as animal sacrifice, in the above mentioned village of Oke-Eri where the Mahdiyya has a community of one hundred and fifty members, there is much greater tolerance of traditional ritual practices of this kind. In Oke-Eri most of the Mahdists are farmers, and while the imam emphasises that what attracted him to the Mahdi-Messiah was the fact that the latter preached and practised "pure" Islam, he and his community, nevertheless, actively participate in the traditional worship, which includes animal sacrifice, of the legendary Birikisu, the Queen of Sheba, who is believed to be buried in the nearby wood. Thus, among Mahdists in south-western Nigeria as among Muslims generally in south-western Nigeria, and as Gellner suggests is the case in the Muslim world as a whole,

the urban centres tend to be the more orthodox, the rural areas the more prone to "mixing".[8]

Therefore, although numerous mahdist communities were established throughout Ijebuland and, in addition to those already mentioned others outside the old kingdom including a small community in the town of Ile-Ife, the focus here will be on the Ibadan, Epe and Ijebu-Igbo communities, the mahdist communities best known to this writer with the exception of the Ijebu-Ode community. And since the last mentioned has already received a great deal of attention it will only be discussed here in relation to the above mentioned communities of Ibadan, Epe and Ijebu-Igbo, all of which, it is interesting to note, owed their origins to a dream and/ or vision. For this reason it seems appropriate to provide at this point some further treatment, promised in chapter four, of the importance of dreams in conversion in black Africa.

Dreams and conversion

As previously noted Islam, along with Christianity and in particular aladura Christianity, shares a keen interest in dreams which can serve many purposes. They are sometimes used, for example, to herald the coming of a specially chosen or powerful leader, as was the case with the famous West African Muslim reformers and jihadists discussed in chapter one, Shaykh Uthman b. Fudi, and Al-Hajj Umar al-Futi.[9] Moreover, as already shown, the Mahdiyya movement itself began with dreams, as did the aladura movement. Often also, as in both the Mahdiyya and the Aladura cases, dreams are used either to legitimate change or to preserve the status quo enabling Muslim holy men and Christian prophets to perform a similar role to the ancestors who through dreams and visions not only re-enforce custom but also sanction changes and new departures including conversion.

Dreams, like divination, have been important in facilitating the entry of both Christianity and Islam to new areas of black Africa including parts of Yorubaland, and in promoting changes within these religions.[10] Moreover, in politics, as in religion, dream power has

counted for a great deal, one eminent Nigerian politician, the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, dreaming that it was the will of God that he should be Nigeria's prime minister and the West African students Union where Nigerian nationalism was born being founded after a dream.[11]

Dreams, it should be mentioned, are not all of a kind; some are good, some evil, depending on their source. Some are true, some false, some significant, some of no significance whatsoever. Some presage disaster some bear glad tidings, some are private and personal some have implications for the community or society as a whole. To know their import an interpreter - in the Muslim tradition this is usually a shaykh and among the aladura it is very often a prophetess - has to be called upon and many of them, at least in Yorubaland, will use traditional techniques such as the mixing of herbs which are then applied to cuts below the interpreter's eyes to help her or him see the dream of the one who requests an interpretation. The shaykh, in addition to interpreting the dream, can also help with its incubation by guiding the would-be dreamer along the right path pointing out where he or she might be going wrong.

Dreams are often sought out by those in search of an answer to a particular problem including the problem of one's religious affiliation. However, to dream fruitfully a number of conditions must be met. An individual must, for example, dream in the right place, on the right night, at the right time, in the right position - for example for a Muslim it should be on one's right side facing East - wearing the right clothes. Also among Muslims ablutions must be performed, cleanliness being very important, as is prayer, and both abstinence and sleeping alone can assist.

As will be seen below, the dream, and the vision, not only proved crucial to the expansion of the Mahdiyya community but also to its reform and to the positions the various communities took up when schism occurred.

The mahdist community at Ibadan

In Ibadan, traditionally regarded as the largest African city in tropical Africa, the Mahdiyya community established itself in the south in the Oke-Foko district already largely inhabited by Ijebu. This choice of location is entirely understandable in the light of what is known about the demography of the city and Islam's image therein. As Parrinder's previously-mentioned pioneering study of religion in Ibadan shows, Islam itself had been regarded for much of its history in this city, beginning in the early nineteenth century, as a "foreign" religion, as the religion of strangers from the North.[12] And although by the late 1940s when the Ijebu Mahdists decided to establish a mosque there and Ibadan was fast becoming, at least in terms of numbers, a Muslim city, there was no heart or centre to this community; Muslims from the same place of origin tended to form separate communities. Of course, the Ijebu being Yoruba, were not regarded nor did they regard themselves as outsiders to the same extent as, for example, the Hausa stranger community in Ibadan studied by Cohen[13] or other "stranger" communities in the city among them the Igbo and Nupe.[14]

However, although they shared a common language, diet and a very similar way of life with many others in Ibadan, the Ijebu there, nevertheless, felt themselves to be in "foreign parts" and it was for this reason that the Mahdiyya came to provide this "stranger" community with a common meeting place and community centre in the form of a large, and impressive mosque in the deprived area of Oke-Foko which at the time this research was undertaken had no suitable access road, the dirt road being impassable during the rainy season. Some two hundred Mahdiyya members frequent this mosque for Friday prayer, the majority of them Ijebu, at which the leader of the Mahdiyya community at Ibadan is imam Rashid, the second oldest of the four sons of the Mahdi-Messiah by his first and senior wife, presides.

The more senior members of the Ibadan community knew the Mahdi-Messiah well and

were attracted to the movement for many of the same reasons as those outlined in the previous chapter in the section on the popular response - the Mahdi's "divine gift" of knowledge, his predictive powers, his message of peace, his punctuality, and so forth.

A large number of disciples, both old and new, attributed their conversion to a dream or vision in which the Mahdi-Messiah invited them to join the movement. In one case, not atypical of other conversion accounts, the individual in question was the recipient of a vision in which the Mahdi-Messiah was seen continuing his mission from paradise where he had been:

> "appointed chairman of the other prophets and was surrounded by such illustrious figures as Muhammad, Jesus, Moses and Abraham."[15]

It was clear to this informant that it was the Mahdi-Messiah who was calling him to be his disciple because as he remembered:

> " I recognised the same scar on the left side of his face above the jaw that I had seen in a photograph of him."[16]

Visions such as these and dreams were recounted, aladura style, to the other members in the mosque during the Friday prayer.

A majority of the converts to the Mahdiyya in Ibadan came from the Ahmadiyya movement and in a number of these cases the idea of a black prophet proved appealing, and not surprisingly given the rising tide of nationalism in the 1950s. One such convert explained that he had heard the Mahdi-Messiah preach at Mapo Hall, Ibadan, in 1956 and was most impressed. However, he was perturbed by the fact that the leaders of the Ahmadiyya movement of which he had been a member since 1952 gave the Ijebu prophet no credit for his learning and wisdom nor did they discuss the issues raised by him, including his opinion that what was customary in Mecca or in other parts of the Muslim world was not necessarily obligatory for Nigerian Muslims. As the Mahdi-Messiah reportedly told his audience: "one could be a perfectly good Muslim without smoking the long Meccan pipe." All that was necessary to be a true Muslim was obedience to the Bible

and Qur'an.

Therefore, to known if he should follow the Mahdi-Messiah - it took him two years to decide - he placed a petition for guidance inside the pages of his Qur'an before going to sleep. As he explained:

> " I put it to God this way: the Mahdi of Qadian (founder of the Ahmadiyya) is a white man, the Mahdi of Ijebu-Ode is a black man. I want you to let me see in my sleep a white man if the true Mahdi is the Mahdi of Qadian and a black man if the true Mahdi is the Mahdi of Ijebu-Ode. That is how I expressed it to God so that I could differentiate. When I made this petition I told my wife not to disturb me and I went to sleep. My question was answered because in my dream I had some problems and I went to an imam for advice and he was a black man and a knowledgeable man and this indicated that the Mahdi of Ijebu-Ode was the true Mahdi."[17]

By the early 1980s, over twenty years after the Mahdi-Messiah's death, the Ibadan Mahdiyya community was still very much a community of Ijebu Muslims living and working in an around the Oke-Foko district of the city, and often returning home to Ijebu-Ode for family reunions, rites of passage and the annual pilgrimage on the anniversary of the Mahdi-Messiah's declaration of the foundation of the New Jerusalem.

The mahdist community at Epe

Epe, once a small settlement of Ijebu farmers and fishermen on the north side of the Lagos lagoon, and part of the Ijebu kingdom until incorporated into the Lagos colony, was turned into a Muslim town in the mid-nineteenth century when the British sent the Muslim ruler of Lagos, Kisoko, and one thousand five hundred of his Muslim subjects into exile there in 1851. By the 1870s the political organization of Epe was entirely in the hands of Muslims who, enforced the Shari'a, after a fashion. This process was curtailed if not reversed by the British government's insistence on government according to "native law and custom" which meant the introduction of Native Councils and Native Courts at the expense of the Shari'a.[18]

The Mahdiyya community was introduced into this one time orthodox stronghold of Islam

by Al-Hajj Majid who became a Mahdist in 1943 after a vision in which:

> "Shaykh Mahdi and his second wife, Shaikha Mahdi, on the way here (Epe) from Ijebu-Ode with eight of their followers reached a junction and stopped there. People surrounded the Mahdi and he told them that he was the last prophet. I searched around Epe for him but did not find him. I then heard that a prophet had been raised up by God in Ijebu-Ode so I went there with my friend, met Shaykh Mahdi and told my friend that this was the prophet that I had seen in my vision."[19]

Before being accepted as disciples these two visitors from Epe were asked to profess their faith in the Mahdi-Messiah and promise obedience and loyalty to both him and his deputy, Shaikha Mahdi. Al-Hajj Majid was later appointed khalifa of the Epe Mahdiyya community and the surrounding villages by Shaykh and Shaikha Mahdi.

It should be noted here that both Al-Hajj Majid and his friend, Al-Hajj Mustapha who accompanied him to Ijebu-Ode to see the Mahdi-Messiah, were not only Ijebu but also like their new messiah, both had been members of the Tijaniyya brotherhood and were familiar with the idea of the Mahdi. Al-Hajj Majid spoke of the millenarian climate in Epe prior to the advent of the Mahdi-Messiah. He recalled:

> " We heard before Shaykh Mahdi came that a Mahdi would be raised up and that we must accept him when he comes."[20]

The khalifa of Epe converted others to Mahdism through his preaching and healing ministry, among them the tailor and qur'anic school teacher Shamba Kiyu. The latter joined the Mahdiyya in 1951 because, as he remembered:

> " I saw the miraculous deeds that they (the Mahdists) were performing. My brother came back from Mecca very, very sick in 1946 and not even the herbalists or prophets of the Cherubim and Seraphim church could heal him so he went to Al-Hajj Majid who prayed for him and he survived his sickness".[21]

Al-Hajj Majid's prayers were efficacious, it was stressed by this informant because, "they were said in the name of Shaykh and Shaikha Mahdi." After his cure Shamba Kiyu visited Shaykh Mahdi, whom he described as a "distinguished person", and was initiated into the Mahdiyya.

But healing was not the only benefit to be derived from conversion. In a number of cases

a better livelihood was the outcome, several converts becoming teachers of "mahdi sciences," others such as the one time fisherman and then casual labourer, Wali Ishiaku, became a "prayer maker", that is "one through whom God speaks and who prays for the recovery of another." Others were given positions of responsibility within the community such as second class khalifa, and some benefitted by being integrated into a wider trading and business network.[22]

Material considerations apart, conversion accounts show the Mahdiyya in Epe resembling closely the aladura churches. Informants in Epe referred to Al-Hajj Majid's unusual powers of healing through prayer, and not only was there a strong prayer element but there was also a very emphatic dream and vision element in this Mahdist community, as in Ibadan and Ijebu-Ode. Armed with biblical texts - Numbers 12vv 6-8 being one of the more frequently cited ones - in defence of dreams and visions as authentic divine revelations many Epe Mahdists explained how their conversion began in this way.

Dreams and visions have also been important as a means of organising and directing the community and of sustaining faith in the founder. At one Friday prayer service the congregation was informed that one of its members, the alufa (teacher or cleric) Animasaum, had received a vision in which Shaykh Mahdi had warned him that the end of the world was close at hand and that his disciples, if they wished to be saved, must not neglect the commandments and the "religion" which he gave them.[23]

The social composition of the Mahdiyya community has already been discussed in the previous chapter and the Epe community diverges very little from the general pattern. A majority of those who joined the Mahdiyya in Epe were either fishermen or farmers. There were also a few Muslim clerics and petty traders. Virtually all of the founder members of the Epe community belonged like the khalifa at one time to the Tijaniyya while in Ibadan, as we have already noted, more of the recruits came from the Ahmadiyya.

Once again among converts in Epe as elsewhere joining the Mahdiyya was seen as going

beyond the boundaries of being simply a Tijani or even a Muslim. It was a move towards a wider vision, a more "spiritual" religion and at the same time it was also a move toward a more ordered and more precisely regulated form of life, a way of imposing greater self-discipline. Much was made and continues to be made of starting and ending services, meetings and all community activities on time, something that not only sharply distinguished the Mahdists from other groups and earned the Mahdiyya the title, as was seen, of "revolutionary religion", but also sheds a great deal of life on the motivation of millenarianism in the Ijebu context, showing it to have been largely inspired, as chapter three in particular emphasised, by a strong desire for order at a time of unprecedented chaos and confusion at every level, especially at the political, moral, religious and social levels.

During the service at the mahdist mosque in Epe, as is the practice in other mahdist mosques, a time is set aside to hear complaints about such "misdeeds" as lateness and this emphasis on punctuality was and continues to be particularly attractive to the substantial minority of young, western-educated converts who appear to have little difficulty in accepting the authority of their much less literate leader, Al-Hajj Majid. This is not so surprising, however, when it is realised that these young western educated members have lost nothing of the widespread belief in visions, dreams, miracles and the power of prayer. These young members, moreover, are active missionaries; told by God in a dream where they should now evangelize they set off for towns and villages in groups to give "lectures" about Mahdism explaining how it is the only religion that seeks to present a true understanding of the Bible and the Qur'an.[24]

Transcending the division between Muslims and Christians was vitally important to the younger members of the Epe community. Indeed, the young Mahdists from Epe found this to be Mahdism's most attractive feature and they gladly recited Christian prayers such as the Lord's prayer, although they were disappointed that Christians were unable to make a

positive response to Islam.

Ijebu-Igbo

The Mahdiyya community in Ijebu-Igbo some fifteen miles to the north-east of Ijebu-Ode has an estimated two thousand members. The history of its beginnings as remembered by informants provides an almost exact replica of that of the foundation of the Epe and other Mahdiyya communities already discussed.

The leader of the Mahdiyya in Ijebu-Igbo, Mr Okemedojo, joined the movement in 1945 after encountering the Mahdi-Messiah and his wife, Shaikha Mahdi, in a dream. At this time he was a Muslim who, in his own words, "continued to practise the old religion". To emphasise this point he spoke of how in his dream he was offering a sacrifice only to be told by the Mahdi-Messiah that such a thing was of no value. He continued his dream in which after fasting for a period of a month he was given a gift in the form of a glittering diamond and beheld several thousand people walking towards his house bearing other precious gifts. He opened the door to receive the gifts only to find that they were for sacrifice to the pagan gods. On waking from sleep this future imam of the Mahdiyya community in Ijebu-Igbo decided to leave his village with his wife and family and go out and preach "the true word of Allah."[25]

The imam further recalled that during his preaching campaigns people used to tell him that what he told them resembled very much the "religion" of the Mahdi-Messiah. However, he had never met the Mahdi-Messiah and before ever meeting him he had two further visions of Shaykh and Shaikha Mahdi. He then asked to meet them both to ascertain if they were the same people as those as he had seen in his vision. They were, as it turned out, and this convinced him that what he was preaching was inspired by the Mahdi-Messiah. Another senior member of the Mahdiyya community in Ijebu-Igbo also attributed his conversion to the Mahdiyya in 1967 to a dream in which he was told that "a prosperous way" was open to him and along which the Mahdi-Messiah would guide him.

On the question of ethnic background, the overwhelming majority of the converts to Mahdism in Ijebu-Igbo were once again Ijebu, with the exception of a small number of Egba from Abeokuta and Badagry. As to members' occupation these varied from farming to the retail trade. Few if any of them were to be found amongst the wealthy or the poorest of the poor. But there was real poverty and hardship both in the mahdist community and the wider society. Mahdists, however, did not consider this a cause for political action or even protest. Patience and faith were the most appropriate and effective weapons for coping with such ills. As the imam of the mahdist mosque in Ijebu-Igbo told his flock in a khutbah or sermon:

> "Anyone who wakes up early in the morning and gets annoyed with the world, thinking there is nothing for him in it and regarding himself as poor and abandoned, is like someone who carries around with him a sword looking to destroy the wisdom of God. . .anyone who cannot appreciate the good things done for him is committing sin and should go and die. . .One should not get annoyed with the world..."[26]

This pacifism is in sharp contrast with the militant Mahdism discussed in chapter one. Nor was it an isolated case. The virtues of gratitude, patience, acceptance of one's lot, resignation and even detachment from material things were encouraged by other mahdist movements among them the previously mentioned mahdist community in Senegal, the Layenne movement.[27] What was fundamental, the Ijebu mahdist believed, was not socio-economic change but what their leader had already set in motion: the moral transformation of society. As a prominent member of the community stated:

> "Because the Mahdi-Messiah has come the world will be improved. People will lead a religious life now whereas before they were of strong mind not to believe".[28]

Returning briefly to the composition of the Ijebu-Igbo mahdist community and the proportion of women to men, the former far outnumbered the latter as was the case in Epe. This preponderance of women needs to be remembered for it provides a partial explanation as to why both of these communities supported Shaikha Mahdi's right to succeed on the death of her husband, the Mahdi-Messiah, in 1959, while the Ibadan community and a

majority of the Ijebu community opposed her. The outcome was schism.

Schism

As Wallis, among others, pointed out, the propensity for schism in a movement increases directly with the availability of means legitimating authority. The more bases of legitimacy there are, or the more widely available they are, the more likelihood there is of schism.[29]

There were a number of such bases in the Mahdiyya movement one of the more solid being Alhaja Rahmatu, the Shaikha Mahdi. Moreover, all of the Mahdi-Messiah's children by both his first and second wife lived at either Ijebu-Ode or Ibadan, thus providing the communities there with several sources of legitimation if they should decide to break away from the main body.

While, as previously stated, all branches of the movement initially accepted the leadership of Shaikha Mahdi the Ijebu-Ode and Ibadan sections did so only reluctantly and only for as long as it was considered diplomatic to do so. However, when fission did come it did so, it should be noted, not only as might be expected over the right of a woman to be overall leader and exercise full authority over men but also over the question of inheritance and property. There was also an important geographical factor already mentioned: links between outlying villages and the capital of Ijebuland were difficult and this meant that central control over the periphery was weak.

Dissension began when the oldest son by the Mahdi-Messiah's first wife, a khalifa in the Mahdiyya at the time and now leader of the largest faction, challenged the decision of Shaikha Mahdi to designate her oldest son as her successor. This brought to the fore the latent tension over several related issues: over Shaikha Mahdi's appointment, over the right of a woman to be overall leader of a religious movement and over the ownership of Muhammad Jumat Imam's possessions.

Regarding the Mahdi-Messiah's possessions it would appear that these matters had been settled in accordance with customary law. Custom could and did change, of course.

Although there was some variation from one part of Yorubaland to another traditionally the principal beneficiaries of a deceased man were his full brothers and sisters, children only having a residuary rights to their father's personal property. However, this tradition had altered by the time of the Mahdi-Messiah's death. By then the prevailing practice was for the goods to be distributed equally between sons of different wives and among daughters where appropriate.

However, while there was a growing tendency to trace kinship links through women as more of the latter acquired wealth and influence, it was still the custom for the first born son to take the biggest share of the land or property previously held by his father.[30] In the case of the Mahdiyya this was the first born son of the founder's first wife who claimed by right the family home and headquarters of the Mahdiyya movement in Idepo street. He also claimed responsibility for the Mosjidi Zahir or Temple of the New Jerusalem.

The main obstacle to realising these claims was the above mentioned decision by Shaikha Mahdi, the second wife, deputy and successor of the Mahdi-Messiah, to appoint her eldest son as her successor. The case went to court and was later withdrawn by Shaikha Mahdi who increasingly turned to using her own family home in Ijebu-Ode as her headquarters. Although there was no formal declaration of a schism relations between the Shaikha Mahdi and the oldest son of the Mahdi-Messiah who, for all practical purposes was now in control in the Idepo street headquarters, were highly strained and from the early 1960s when the Shaikha Mahdi announced that her eldest son would succeed until 1975. During this period there were in practice two Mahdiyya communities in Ijebu-Ode, one centred on the old Idepo-Street home of the Mahdi-Messiah and led by his oldest son, the other centred on the home of the Shaikha Mahdi, situated about one mile away and close to the outskirts of the town, and presided over by her oldest son.

The four remaining sons of the Mahdi-Messiah's first marriage all supported the claim of their older brother to lead the Mahdiyya. They all, of course, stood to benefit from their

support by receiving a somewhat larger share in their father's property. On the other side both her sons and her three daughters gave their support to Shaikha Mahdi.

The schism, as previously mentioned, did not occur over property alone; there was also strong opposition in the Mahdiyya movement in Ijebu-ode to the idea of a woman as overall leader. While this potentially divisive issue hardly mattered a great deal during the Mahdi-Messiah's lifetime when it was only a possibility and notional assent at that stage could easily be given, the situation appeared much different on his death. Then, when real assent was called for, people's true feelings emerged and these proved to be more conservative and traditional, or perhaps fundamentalist, than that of their leader.

Asked to explain why the movement splintered, the present imam of the Mahdiyya mosque at Ibadan, Rashid Otubu, the second oldest son of the Mahdi-Messiah's first wife, replied:

> " According to the Qur'an if a man gives birth to a boy that boy will eventually succeed him. The beloved wife of Shaikh Mahdi (his second or junior wife), beloved to him, gave him two women and tree male children. . .My mother, his first wife, gave five to him, four male and one female. Therefore, since he gave birth to four male children by his first wife how can some other woman come and succeed him? His second wife thought the property of my father was hers. Shaikha Mahdi was junior to my mother..."[31]

As in so many other matters the question of who was the rightful leader was settled for many through a dream or vision. A certain Al-Hajj Yusuf from Ile-Ife was perplexed over the divisions within the movement and uncertain about whom he should follow when the Mahdi-Messiah resolved the issue for him by appearing in one of his dreams and confirming that his oldest son by his first marriage and not Shaikha Mahdi was his rightful successor:

> " The Mahdi-Messiah walked into the office of his most senior son, the chief Imam, took the ledger that was in front of him on the desk, signed it and stamped it."[32]

There was no doubt, this informant along with many others insisted, that the Mahdi-Messiah had appointed Shaikha Mahdi's as his deputy. However, it was explained that this was for the purpose of ensuring that there was an "Iya adinni", a leader of the women's

branch of the movement, an interpretation that was difficult to gainsay since there was nothing in writing. But even this limited role was denied Shaikha Mahdi by the wife of the new leader and her supporters, leaving the former with the support of only a small faction of the Ijebu-Ode community.

As mentioned above the Epe and Ijebu-Igbo communities accepted the authority of the Shaikha Mahdi and remained loyal to her throughout. The Epe community explained that its decision to uphold the authority of Shaikha Mahdi was in compliance with the Mahdi-Messiah's last orders to his followers. The leader of the community recalled that:

> "On January 3rd 1959 Shaykh Mahdi called all his caliphs to his house in Ijebu-Ode and told them: 'I am the prophet. All the prophets that came before me testified to my coming but after me there will be no other prophet. I have finished my work. What I commanded came from God and no one can add or subtract from it. Now God will send his commands to you through Shaikha Mahdi.' He then told them that Shaikha Mahdi had the authority to appoint new caliphs and gave the caliphs the authority to initiate new members into the Mahdiyya."[33]

Epe Mahdists and those from Ijebu-Igbo claimed to have found no difficulty in accepting the authority of a woman. Some even believed that Shaikha Mahdi was an indispensible part of God's plan; she was the new Eve as the Mahdi-Messiah was the new Adam sent to renew the world.[34] Indeed, this community seems to have marshalled a good deal of biblical evidence in defence of their stand on behalf of Shaikha Mahdi's right to rule. Informants promptly called this enquirer's attention to passages in the Bible which referred to prophetesses who held positions of authority and took major decisions affecting the whole community, among them Deborah in Judges 4v4, Miriam in Exodus 15v20 and Anna in Luke 2v 36. Asked about the Qur'an's teaching on women as overall leaders Epe informants replied:

> "the holy Qur'an (46 v12) came to bear witness to the Bible."[35]

Of course, the views of the Epe community on women as overall leaders had never been put to the test. Their own local leader, and this mattered most, was a man, as was the case in Ijebu Igbo, the other community which gave staunch support to Shaikha Mahdi.

However, the fact that these communities were predominantly female may also have contributed to their resolute defence of the right of Shaikha Mahdi to succeed her husband as leader of the whole community. Furthermore, by supporting Shaikha Mahdi they could the more easily press for and justify total independence from the centre which, it could now be convincingly argued, had deviated from the teachings and instructions laid down by the Mahdi-Messiah.

The controversy over a woman as overall religious leader was not confined to the Mahdiyya or similar Muslim groups. Among the aladura churches, as we saw in a previous chapter, a similar controversy beset the Cherubim and Seraphim church over the leadership of the already mentioned prophetess Captain Christianah Abiodun Akinsowon. In this church, as in other aladura churches, a woman can in theory hold any position.

However, in the Cherubim and Seraphim church there was considerable reluctance to accept Captain Abiodun, one of the co-founders of the church, as overall leader and indeed despite protests in support of her right to this post she was never allowed to hold it being offered instead the position of supreme head of all the women of the movement, an offer which she rejected. And while this was not the immediate cause of a schism in the church it ruled out any prospect of reconciliation between her supporters, mainly young men and women, and the rest of the society from which she had separated earlier.[36]

Some women, it was also pointed out, did rise to the position of overall leadership of religious movements but usually only after they had separated from the main body of the movement to which they belonged, or by becoming the leader of a local branch of a church which they then turned into an independent church in its own right. These women were usually exceptionally strong personalities, with considerable charisma and, it can be added, either incapable of bearing a child or beyond the age of child bearing.

Thus, even in "progressive" religious movements hostile to Traditionalists many of the old taboos relating to women remained strongly entrenched, prohibiting them from performing

the ritual and other duties associated with high office. For example, both the Cherubim and Seraphim society and the Mahdiyya bar a women from the house of prayer for forty days after giving birth to a male child and eighty days after a female child.

By 1975 the rift in the Mahdiyya community had in one sense been healed and in another it had deepened. It had healed to the extent that the two factions no longer opposed each other in public - for example by holding separate processions around the town - and all had begun once again to frequent together the Mosjidi Zahiri or Temple of the New Jerusalem. On the other hand the various communities had drifted further apart and had become quasi-independent units under their own leaders, with very little attachment to the central authority in Ijebu-Ode.

The schism, thus, had opened the way for other would be messiahs to enter upon the stage and compete for a following in a context where the charismatic authority that had inspired and held the movement together had been seriously weakened albeit not completely destroyed, the founder in some measure continuing his rule from the tomb.

The routinization of charisma

A rare phenomenon, genuine charisma is, as we have seen, generated by a belief in the mysterious gift imparted to one individual who then shares it with those who follow him.[37] The kind of authority, charismatic authority, that arises out of such a relationship, it has already been noted, changes its form on the death of a charismatic leader and even before this moment. As Wallis stated:

> "charismatic and rational-legal orientations may be immanent tensions within a social movement, rather than sequential phases (emphasis mine)."[38]

In chapters five and six it was shown that while the Mahdi-Messiah's authority was for the most part clearly charismatic there was also an element of rational calculation in the way he exercised that authority and administered the Mahdiyya. For example, the overall structure of authority within the movement was largely based on the traditional age-grade

(regberegbe) system and, as a consequence, from the very outset a number of his disciples had acquired the status of privileged companions controlling access to the leader and interpreting his words, and this inevitably gave rise to a conflict between charisma and routinization.

The demise, then, of charismatic authority in the Mahdiyya movement was an on-going process which reached something of a climax at the point when the problem of succession had to be solved. The situation at that juncture resembled that depicted by Weber who maintained that at the time of the death of a prophet the message tends to become dogma, while tradition takes over from charisma as the basis of domination, and the movement loses its "emergency" character.[39]

However, such a description of the routinization of charisma cannot be applied without qualification to the Mahdiyya movement where the Mahdi-Messiah, even after his death, continues to be the one to whom the members give total loyalty and obedience. Moreover, it is he who appears in visions and dreams directing the movement along the right path by initiating revivals or visiting respected and long serving disciples for the purpose of using them as his mouthpiece to warn his community about the dangers of loss of faith. On one occasion a leading member of the Ibadan Mahdiyya community was instructed by the Mahdi in a dream to call all members to repentance and renewal:

> "I dreamt I saw the Mahdi with a lot of people behind him and we his congregation were on the other side of the river. There was a certain bridge between us here and them on the other side of the river. When I went to step on that bridge I saw it was old, it was dead wood. 'Don't step on it, you will fall down', he told me. I said to him that it was too (sic) bad to step on it. He said to me 'You people pervert it. You no longer walk in Allah's way. Between me and Allah there is a bridge. . .before you can get to me and go to Allah you must be changed. People must follow me. You have been sleeping, you have been wicked'."[40]

Thus, although appointment to the leadership became almost entirely dependent on traditional criteria, the oldest son stepping into his father's shoes, the charisma of the founder continued to serve to correct, renew and instil obedience and faith. A similar

situation exists in Twelver Shi'ite Islam where the Hidden Imam, as was pointed out in chapter one, continues to control events from his place of concealment.

Moreover, a charismatic leader through his tomb which in some parts of the Muslim world very quickly becomes a shrine and a sources of baraka and/or charisma, can remain the focal point of allegiance. Indeed his tomb may enable him not only to continue to exercise power after death but even to widen the scope of that power. While generally in Nigerian Islam this is not as frequent an occurrence as it is, for example, in North African Islam [41] the tomb of the Mahdi-Messiah became just such a shrine. Indeed in this respect the Mahdiyya resembles more closely the aladura movement than anything Islamic found in south-western Nigeria.

Among the aladura there are several examples of the emergence of posthumous cults, one well known example being the cult of Moses Orinmolade, formerly supreme head of the Cherubim and Seraphim society. Not only are prayers offered at his tomb at Ojokoro but some followers sleep in a chamber underneath it in order to obtain "spiritual power". In Peel's words, the tomb is:

> "half saint's shrine, half ancestor's grave."[42]

As, therefore, in traditional society the ancestor watches over the community to ensure that its customs and traditions were preserved and kept, so likewise do Christian and/ or Muslim prophets, including the founder of the Mahdiyya, concern themselves from the tomb with the continuity and integrity of the movement's beliefs and practices.

The Mahdi-Messiah's tomb greatly facilitated this development. Erected, as was previously mentioned, in the courtyard at the rear of the Mosjidi Zahir or Temple of the New Jerusalem this tomb was soon turned into a shrine which not only sustained the Mahdi-Messiah's charisma after his death but also widened his appeal. It was there that followers would go to pray for advice, guidance, solace, forgiveness and uplift. Moreover, it was this shrine that preserved a degree of unity among the disparate, feuding mahdist factions that

contested Shaikha Mahdi's right to overall authority. Mahdists whatever their differences could be seen at this shrine wearing the same long white outer garment, performing the same ritual of circumambulation as at Mecca, with the difference that at the Temple of the New Jerusalem the centre-piece was not a black stone (kaabah) but the Mahdi-Messiah's tomb.

The tomb of the Mahdi-Messiah also made possible what proved exceptionally difficult during his lifetime; it enabled the Mahdiyya movement to breakout of its isolationism as a purely Ijebu based movement. Once the Mahdi-Messiah's tomb became known as a place of miracle and healing others, Yoruba and non-Yoruba alike, followers and others, came to visit it, giving Muhammad Jumat Imam that wider recognition that he had sought in life. There are other ways in which the death of a founder can make for the persistence of charismatic authority. In the Mahdiyya movement the death of the Mahdi-Messiah, and the division that arose over the leadership of Shaikha Mahdi, opened up space for further charisma within the movement. As was shown, those communities on the periphery could now exercise greater independence and enjoyed much wider scope for exercising their charismatic gifts. Khalifas, instead of calling on the chief imam to exercise his healing and other supernatural powers which he claimed to have inherited from his father, began to display their own "divine" gifts of healing, predicting and interpreting dreams.

Their charisma, if one can meaningfully talk of charisma in this way, was clearly of a more restricted kind than that of the Mahdi-Messiah. It was restricted in numerous ways and not least by the fact that the Mahdi-Messiah had set the pattern, created the style of charismatic behaviour for the Mahdiyya movement and, therefore, any genuine leader of the movement as a whole or of a branch of it was obliged thereafter to follow this pattern or model if he/she hoped to succeed. Observers noted this in the case of the leader of the Epe community, Al-Hajj Majid, in particular. He reportedly enjoyed considerably more success after the schism when he modelled his appearance, gestures and tone of voice on

those of the Mahdi-Messiah.

Even the Mahdi-Messiah's son and successor did not base his authority simply on the fact that he was the oldest son of the founder and therefore his rightful successor. He, too, was a visionary seeing in one of his dreams the Mahdi-Messiah, surrounded by Jesus and Muhammad, commanding him to care for his followers, a dream corroborated by some of the more venerable members of the movement who had been close friends and confidants of his father.

These claims, however, were of little avail for while many followers found the new Imam competent most regarded him as uninspiring. He produced attractive order of service manuals and kept rigidly to the tradition of punctuality established by his father.[43] But he was an administrator not an innovator.

Among the Mahdi-Messiah's sons there was one who not only closely resembled his father in appearance and temperament but also inspired faith and trust. However, this son also happened to be the oldest son of Shaikha Mahdi. Furthermore, he placed his business interests, preference for a secular rather than a religious career, and his liking for alcohol, above his interest in the Mahdiyya movement. Moreover, the fact that he lived in Ibadan where his extremely competent and committed step-brother was imam of that city's Mahdiyya mosque, also helps to explain the small size of his following in Ijebu-Ode, a following which he rarely visited.

Conclusion

The uncontroversial, quiet, unobtrusive, diplomatic style of the new leader of the majority mahdist faction in Ijebu-Ode ensured that by the late 1970s and early 1980s when this study ends, the official wing of the Mahdiyya community had all but returned to the mainstream of the Muslim community. Moreover, views of rank and file Mahdists on their founder's role had begun to change. He was a prophet like any other genuine prophet but not unique or special, was the response of a growing number of followers.

This fitted well with official policy which, while seeking to preserve the Mahdiyya as an independent movement, was anxious that Muhammad Jumat Imam should now be regarded primarily not as a Mahdi-Messiah, an idea offensive both to Muslims and Christians, but as an inspired religious leader and teacher, and a nationalist, who sought to promote unity and peace between Muslims and Christians, sentiments and aspirations shared, as already noted, by those who had assumed the responsibility for fashioning an integrated nation out of great diversity and whose one great fear was "balkanization" or partition along Indian lines.[44]

1. M. O. Ogundunsin, "Mahdism in Islam with special reference to the Mahdi of Ijebu-Ode", op. cit.

2. See: Meyer Fortes, Oedipus and Job in West African religion, (with an essay by R. Horton) op. cit., chap.7 pp. 27 ff.

3. P. B. Clarke, "The Ismaili Khojas: A Sociological Study of An Islamic Sect in London", M.Phil. Dissertation, King's College, University of London, 1974.

4. This estimate is based on interviews with observers and on the writings of M. O. A. Abdul and in particular his: "Islam in Ijebu-Ode", (M. A. thesis, McGill University, 1967)

5. This and subsequent biblical references are to the Jerusalem Bible A. Jones (ed) London: Darton and Longman Todd, 1966.

6. NAI (UIL): The Private Papers of M. J. Imam op. cit.

7. J. S. Eades, The Yoruba Today, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980 p.60 and passim.

8. E. Gellner, "A Pendulum Swing Theory of Islam", in R. Robertson (ed) A Sociology of Religion, Harmondsworth, Middlsx: Penguin books, 1970 pp. 127-38.

9. See: M. Hiskett, "The Song of the Shaihu's Miracles: A Hausa Hagiography from Sokoto", African Language Studies, 12, (1979), p. 81 and 89. Also: J.R.Willis, In the Path of Allah: The Passion of Al Hajj Umar, London: Frank Cass, 1989, chap.V.

10. Clarke, West Africa and Christianity, op. cit., chap.6 and passim.

11. Fisher, "Dreams and Conversion in Black Africa", op. cit., p. 235.

12. G. Parrinder, Religion in an African City, op. cit., pp. 63 ff.

13. A. Cohen, "The Stranger communities: the Hausa", in The City of Ibadan, (eds) A. L. Mabogunje, P. C. Lloyd and B. Awe, London: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

14. A. L. Mabogunge, P. C. Lloyd and B. Awe (eds), The City of Ibadan, op. cit.

15. Interview with the Mahdist Al-Hajj Raji, Ibadan, op. cit, 10th Feb. 1978.

16. Ibid.

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19. Interview with Al-Hajj Majid, the chief imam of the Mahdiyya community, Epe, 25th June, 1978.

20. Ibid.

21. Interview with mahdist Shamba Kiyu, Epe, 18th May, 1978.

22. Interviews with mahdists in Epe, 28th January, 1978.

23. Ibid.

24. Interviews with young Mahdists in Epe 7th June, 1978.

25. Interview with the chief imam of the Mahdiyya community, Ijebu-Igbo, 22nd January, 1978.

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28. Interview Ijebu-Igbo 8th January, 1978.

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30. See Forde, The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria, op. cit.,pp. 24 ff.

31. Interview with Imam Rashid, Mahdiyya Mosque, Ibadan 22nd May, 1977.

32. Interview with al-Hajj Yusuf, Ijebu-Ode, 18th October, 1977.

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42. Peel, The Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba, op. cit., p. 273.

43. One of the principal critics of the Chief Imam is his junior brother, the Imam of the Ibadan mosque, and this may possibly indicate a degree of "sibling rivalry". However, from all accounts the junior brother is by far the more talented and dynamic leader of the two.

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Conclusion: Ijebu Mahdism in Comparative Perspective

Now that the materials of Ijebu Mahdism have been assembled a more rounded attempt can be made to highlight what it shares in common with other mahdist movements and particularly those of West African origin and also single out its distinctive characteristics. Brief comparisons and contrasts will also be made with Christian messianic and Marxist inspired millenarian movements, a theme touched upon more than once already and one taken up at length by Hodgkin,[1] before considering the special character of the Mahdiyya and the social experiences which gave rise to this particular mahdist movement and, more generally, to mahdist movements in Nigeria and West Africa. The study ends with the suggestion that the Mahdiyya movement of Ijebuland is best described not as a restorative movement, a label that would fittingly describe most mahdist movements of Nigerian and West African origin, but as a revitalization movement.

The Mahdiyya, Mahdism, Messianism and Marxism compared

First we turn to those characteristics that the Mahdiyya shares with other mahdist movements. Chapter one of this study showed that Mahdism often served as a device for creating group cohesion, or in Ibn Khaldun's terminology "asabiyya". According to Ibn Khaldun, it will be recalled, Mahdism alone had the potential to unite the clan of the prophet Muhammad and enable it to regain its power and influence.[2] And also in chapter one we saw how in the West African and Nigerian context, the main interest of this study, Mahdism came to play such a decisive role in the construction and integration of communities such as the Tokolor, composed of people of low or servile status with no sense of their own identity and with no common bond other than their marginality and insecurity.[3]

Mahdism was also preached at those moments when it was necessary to fire followers with zeal for jihad or encourage them to remain steadfast when in danger of defeat and this was never more the case than during the nineteenth century in West Africa, a time of neo-

mahdist resurgence, even frenzy, with, as we saw, the messianic impulse something of an irresistible force. Mahdism also became a compelling belief elsewhere including India and Afghanistan.[4] And it is worth noting the somewhat ambivalent purposes to which the belief was put in these last mentioned territories: while the Mahdi concept was drawn upon in order to galvanize support against colonialism it was also made by some, including Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, to serve a secular, modernistic purpose.[5] In West Africa, likewise, attitudes to Mahdism were often mixed, even in the case of the same individual. Shaykh Uthman b. Fudi, the leader of the jihad in Hausaland, northern Nigeria, in the early nineteenth century, adopted an extremely equivocal, if not totally contradictory, stand toward Mahdism. Before the jihad began and during it he clearly indicated that the Mahdi would soon appear. Moreover, he not only expressed the opinion that he himself possessed many of the attributes associated with the Mahdi but also that he could well be the Mahdi. However, after the main campaigns of the jihad had been fought and won Shaykh Uthman turned to his followers and explained that much of what he had said on these matters was mistaken, a clear indication that like many others including the Shi'ite rulers of Iran, he realized the danger to the smooth working of any administration of the mahdist belief. Shi'ite rulers, as was seen in chapter one, had every reason to fear Mahdism for as one authority has explained with reference to Iran:

> "The Mahdistic tenet, when fully activated, has been shown to render ethically rationalized normative order inoperative."[6]

The principal purposes which Mahdism was made to serve elsewhere - the creation, fostering or restoring of unity, the lifting of spirits cast down by "defeat" and the creation of a sense of common purpose - were also evident in the Mahdiyya movement of Ijebuland. Also part of its appeal generally and in the Ijebu context was the meaning it gave for the present and the material improvements it brought, much in the same way as Weber's Calvinist communities or, as many protestant, millenarian sects operating in Latin

America today, while preaching the necessity of always being prepared for the imminent advent of Jesus, paradoxically encourage a this-worldly orientation by addressing and in some instances helping to resolve the important issues of everyday life. Also clearly at work here much of the time is the harmonization of belief and circumstance in a way akin to the operation of, once again, Weber's notion of elective affinity.

As to the differences, the Mahdiyya movement of Ijebuland found no place for a number of ideas present in the West African and northern Nigerian tradition of Mahdism as described in chapter one of this study. Ijebu Mahdism, for example, rejected the idea of jihad of the sword or holy war and the notion of the ultimate triumph of Islam. Nor was it characterised by a purely restorative ethic; its goal was not the search for a lost purity, a past Golden Age but the going back to an authentic Muslim and Christian past in order to transcend the prevailing limited interpretations of these creeds and create a new faith. What the Mahdiyya of Ijebuland foresaw, as chapter five explained, was the creation by peaceful means - especially through prayer, faith, true understanding of the Christian and Muslim scriptures - of a new integrated world in which Christians and Muslims, joined in a new "religion of the spirit" that moved beyond contemporary interpretations of Islam and Christianity, would worship together.

And lastly on the matter of the main differences between the Mahdiyya and the West African tradition of Islamic millenarianism, the founder of the Ijebu movement was regarded as a prophet in his own right and not, as was most often the case, simply the last caliph and/ or deputy of the prophet Muhammad.

A comparison of Mahdism in general and the Mahdiyya in particular with Christian inspired messianic and even Marxist versions of millenarianism show that while there are close similarities between them they also stand apart. To take the comparison with Marxism first. The Mahdist message, as already indicated, was rarely if ever dressed up in a purely other-worldy guise. While Mahdis, it is true, preached the reform and renewal of Islam as

their primary goal there was much in their manifestos about such social wrongs as the heavy, and even unjust, taxation of the poor. However, as already pointed out in previous chapters (see in particular chapters one, five, six and seven), it would be wrong to conclude that Mahdist movements were ritually masked revolutionary social movements on marxist lines.

Hodgkin singled out several differences between mahdist and marxist inspired movements, one of them being that the latter involves:

> "a much more carefully constructed, and objectively better grounded, method of historical interpretation and sociological analysis than the methods employed by Mahdist and Messianic movements."[7]

Moreover, the same scholar, while recognising that on occasion Marxist leaders have also taken a millenarian view of the prospects of world revolution, believed that generally:

> "The classless society of Communism is conceived not as imminent, but as realizable after a complex and protracted period of effort, conflict and transition, involving many regressive as well as progressive phases."[8]

In other words Marxists adopt a more considered, clearly defined, realistic strategy of change or revolution than Mahdists.

Hodgkin also noted a number of similarities and differences between mahdist and messianic movements that can be briefly mentioned here. Their millenarian aspirations apart, in both kinds of movement the messianic leader in the form of Mahdi or Messiah has a vital role. Both, furthermore, reject established authority as illegitimate or oppressive, insist on the introduction of a puritanical code of conduct, and attempt to use the universality of their message as a device for overcoming traditional discord and conflict.[9]

Moreover, like mahdist movements in the African setting, Christian inspired messianic movements more often than not place great emphasis on the this-worldly character of the kingdom. Examples of messianic movements of this kind include Kimbanguism and those other Kongo prophet movements studied by MacCaffey, the Aladura movement in western Nigeria which Peel observed and the Bantu prophetic movements which Sundkler examined

at great length.[10] To quote Sundkler:

> "From 1913, the burning desire of the African for land and security produced the apocalyptic pattern of the Zionist and Messianic myths whose warp and woof are provided by native land policy and Christian, or at least Old Testament, material."[11]

Furthermore, in all of the above mentioned instances much time was devoted to a wide range of spiritual and other matters including healing - in this the Mahdi-Messiah, like the aladura prophets whom he closely resembled, took the place of the traditional healer - discovering where in God's plan of salvation they fitted in, to making sense of and interpreting for others the contemporary social situation which witnessed the old dispensation being dismantled and replaced by a new one - which, while it promised a great deal, in practice, for the vast army of those unqualified to benefit from it - gave very little, and to reconciling opposites. All of these were preoccupations, as this study has shown, of the Mahdiyya movement.

However, there are important differences between messianic and mahdist movements the most striking one being that the former, though they look to a transformed social order to be achieved in the not too distant future, are not persuaded that this transformation must of necessity be brought about by revolutionary action on the part of the faithful. And clearly in this respect, the Mahdiyya movement with its insistence on a peaceful approach, not only continued on that tradition of quietistic Islam of the Jakhanke, Mande and those other pacific Muslim communities elsewhere in West Africa which were described in chapter one, but also fits better in the category of the messianic response to the problem of evil rather than in the strict mahdist category.

<u>The special character of the Mahdiyya</u>

From this brief comparison it might be objected that what the Mahdiyya offered the Ijebu was already present in abundance in such movements as the Ahmadiyya or Aladura, both of which have been frequently referred to in this study. However, although the title Mahdi-Messiah chosen by Muhammad Jumat Imam was clearly borrowed from the Ahmadiyya

movement, it would, nevertheless, be incorrect to see the Mahdiyya as a carbon copy of this movement. It possessed a special, distinctive character of its own which lay chiefly in its unusual intellectual and moral stance.

For example, the spirit of reconciliation and integration that the Mahdiyya strove to foster clearly distinguished it from the more exclusivist Ahmadiyya movement, and indeed from most if not all mahdist movements,[12] as did its links with Christian communities and in particular with the Aladura movement with which, as was seen in chapter four and elsewhere in this study, it shared much in common, including the latter's central belief in prayer as the primary and indispensable means of healing. The Mahdiyya was also marked by an "aladura-like" this-worldly orientation in that, as we have seen, religious belief and practice were reinterpreted to bring them into a more congruous relationship with a newly emerging cultural and socio-economic order.[13]

However, the Mahdiyya movement differed markedly in the 1940s and 1950s from any other religious movement in Ijebuland, including the aladura movement; it represented a rare synthesis, purposely and painstakingly constructed, of Muslim and Christian belief and practice. This is not to suggest that it was highly unorthodox even from a Sunni Muslim perspective. As was seen, the Mahdi-Messiah's teaching on the theme of Christian-Muslim relations was "sound" in the opinion of a small number of local Muslim experts who claimed that his only error was to declare himself a prophet and thereby imply that the prophet Muhammad was not the seal or last of the genuine prophets. However, to many both Muslims and Christians, who were conditioned to believe that church and mosque were mutually exclusive where truth and worship were concerned, Muhammad Jumat Imam's idea of a "religion of the spirit" that transcended the Muslim-Christian divide, was both unorthodox and revolutionary.

It was this above all else that made of Mahdism a unique response to change: it was the only religious movement in Ijebuland and south-western Nigeria that sought to resolve the

contemporary political and other tensions in society and point to a way forward by transcending religious difference. Moreover, the methods advocated were not those of jihad or apologetics, nor was the aim to show the superiority of one faith over another but rather the teaching of a correct understanding of the Qur'an and Bible regarding Christian-Muslim relations, and the creation of a new person formed by the observance of a new moral code based on Judeo-Christian and Muslim precepts, a concern which is the very stuff of millenarianism, according to Burridge, who wrote:

> ". . .millenarian movements involve the adoption of new assumptions, a new redemptive process, a new politico-economic framework, a new mode of measuring the man, a new community: in short, a new man."[14]

The leitmotif of the Mahdi-Messiah's new moral code, it is worth recalling again, was its insistence that in dealings with others, as in the practice of religion, right motive and intention were essential. And this emphasis on motive and intention not only reflects the achievement oriented character of Yoruba society described in chapter two but would also seem to indicate, using Douglas's typology of societies as our guide, a transition in Ijebuland to an even less socially cohesive, more individualistic society. In such a society with status more than ever a matter of accomplishment as the common bonds and the general social structure weaken, the need for "asabiyya" especially, but not exclusively, among the unskilled and more economically, emotionally and socially deprived and marginal elements in society becomes much more pressing.[15]

Such conditions can give rise to different even opposite responses on the one hand the more open, constructive response of the Mahdiyya and on the other the more closed, oppositional response of the Bamidele movement. This last mentioned movement, previously referred to in chapter seven, perhaps more than any other local religious collectivity, highlights the special character of the Mahdiyya movement's response to change.

Abdul Salami Bamidele, born of Christian (Baptist) parents in Ibadan at the close of the

nineteenth century and educated at St.James's Anglican school in the same city, spoke of his having dreamed one day during a lesson that God had destined him to be a Mujjadid, Renewer of the Muslim faith.[16] Numerous supernatural signs were proof of this, among them the fact that he mastered the Arabic language in four months. Bamidele founded his movement in the 1930s when he returned to Ibadan after a ten year absence in Lagos, and from the outset not only was western education prohibited but all forms of western influence were condemned. Informants explained to this writer that such an education would make them like Europeans and Bamidele parents would chant:

> "My child will not attend any (western) school at all..As for the Qur'an he will study everything."

And:

> "My child will not travel to a European country. As for Mecca, he, his wife and children will go."[17]

Not only was there no use for Christian education or Christian ways but all forms of "pagan" identity such as scarification, tattooing, indigenous names and dress were also forbidden "under pain of hell fire".[18] Moreover, purdah was strictly enforced, as was the Shari'a as interpreted by Bamidele. Adultery, for example, was punished by between forty and eighty lashes administered by the members themselves, allegedly for didactic purposes. Members, furthermore, were obliged to wear Muslim dress,for as their Shaykh explained:

> "What does it profit a man if he says he is a Muslim but does not look like me? If he wears no turban, has no beard and if his women go about shamelessly is he a true Muslim? The answer is No".[19]

Thus, for the Bamidele, fundamentalist Islam was their identity, security, their response to change, resembling the "Islam clos" as described by the French sociologist Charnay[20], in contrast with the Mahdiyya which sought to create a religious basis for integration presenting this as a unique opportunity for the Ijebu people; this task of unification, the Mahdi-Messiah revealed to them, was their role in God's scheme of things.

The social experience of Ijebu Mahdism

The social experience that gave this message its appeal and thus gave rise to Ijebu Mahdism has been described in considerable detail in previous chapters and in particular in chapter three. What was said there does not differ greatly from theories advanced by others to account for the phenomenon of millenarianism. These theories include the sociological one of uneven contact between two societies, one much further advanced technologically than the other.[21] The contact and subsequent imposition of an alien culture by the technologically more advanced society, it is argued, creates a sense of almost unalterable deprivation - not only economic but also psychic, moral and status deprivation - as people experience the loss of their traditional way of life and civilization.

A theory such as this cannot, of course, explain all cases of Mahdism either in the Ijebu, all-Nigerian, wider West African or other contexts. Mahdism in West Africa, as chapter one makes clear, predates such contact, as does millenarian activity elsewhere. For example, there is evidence of millenarianism among the Guarani of South America prior to contact with an outside, technologically vastly more advanced culture.[22] Furthermore, not every instance of such contact results in millenarian movements, as the case of Polynesia illustrates.[23] Other theories suffer from similar limitations among them the period of rapid change or crisis hypothesis that generates anxiety that results in millenarian fervour.

This, however, is not to suggest they have no part in an explanation of a particular mahdist or millenarian movement. Far from it. This account of the Mahdiyya of Ijebuland, as already stated, attributes its emergence in part to the increasing contact between three cultures, one of which, the western one associated with imperialism and Christianity, was perceived as technologically far superior to the other two, the Muslim and the traditional or indigenous Yoruba culture. After contact with western culture Mahdism began to spread within the more settled, traditional, technologically less advanced society as its polity was seriously threatened.

As was shown in chapter three, the extent of this threat was not immediately obvious in Ijebuland. It only became so a decade or more after the introduction of the "Sole Native Authority" system in 1916. From then onwards there could be no mistaking the extent to which the new, incoming western, Christian culture in particular could, if not opposed, disrupt traditional systems of healing, kinship, landrights, education, status, wealth, security, means of commercial and economic exchange, ethics, morality and the myths, rituals and symbols of authority that provided legitimation for traditional political and social structures. Some, mainly the Christian, western educated elite, with their sights set on wielding power in the New Africa, welcomed the end of the "Old Order" in so far as it undermined the basis of the traditional rule which they regarded as an obstacle to their own designs. The response of others to the effects of this culture contact and "deprivation" varied from outright opposition to compromise, depending both on the extent to which they continued to regard traditional rituals and symbols as sacred truths and the more mundane consideration of the remoteness or otherwise of their prospects of "a place in the sun" either in the new colonial order or after its demise.

But whatever their response, the loss of royal legitimacy and with it the sense of Ijebu identity and nationhood, the awujale being the traditional symbol of the kingdom's unity and identity, the lack of mediators who could appeal to all irrespective of religious, economic and political differences, made the new identities and the deep social, cultural and political rifts and divisions to which colonialism and the religions of Islam and Christianity gave rise, much more difficult to reconcile and opened the way for the charismatic leader.

It is not, however, being suggested that everyone preferred the past or that those who turned to Mahdism did so from a desire to preserve the status quo, or with a view to rejecting all foreign influence. For some, those who suffered from that long term, structural poverty mentioned in chapter one, certain changes bought by the world religions and

colonialism were welcome. Others, usually self-sufficient, were not unlike their leader, although they lacked his education and respected family background. Indeed, like Muhammad Jumat Imam, they were grappling with the threat of marginality: by conviction, temperament and desire Ijebu, they sought to absorb the benefits of the new order while retaining much of their customary life style and identity, in contrast to those who seemed prepared to sacrifice both in order to be a success in the new dispensation. And the Mahdi-Messiah's cruciform Mosjidi Zahiri or Temple of the New Jerusalem is perhaps the clearest symbol of this attempt to come to terms with European and Christian ideas and assumptions, without destroying all that was of value in the local culture.

Mahdism, of course, would not have appealed had it not been for its talented, charismatic leader. Although largely self-taught, and perhaps, contrary to his own self-evaluation, not entirely suited by education, temperament and disposition for leadership either in the old or the new dispensation, this self proclaimed prophet displayed an impressive range of gifts and talents not the least of which was his ability to externalise and articulate what others felt deeply and aspired to but were unable to express with any coherence and confidence, or act upon.

It was this kind of success as much as anything else, as chapter six explained, that made him a "true" prophet, the false or would-be prophet, by contrast, being the one who either does not or cannot put into words what the community feels. And it was this talent that enabled him on the one hand to serve as a focus for reconstructing a fragmented society in a new and imaginative way and on the other to act as a counterbalance to established authority which had lost its legitimacy.

<u>The Mahdiyya as a revitalization movement</u>

Any attempt to classify an Islamic millenarian movement such as the Mahdiyya, or for that matter any kind of religious movement, by resort to one or other of the available descriptive labels is beset with difficulties, not the least of which is that movements go

through phases in which they emphasise different concerns and manifest different responses to the wider society and its system of values. Moreover, at any one point, mahdist and more generally millenarian movements fuse a number of different orientations, most commonly the restorative and retributive, informing the future paradise which they envisage will shortly come about with notions and images of the past, and thereby ensuring that no paradise is totally unfamiliar to their followers.

Despite these difficulties, there is a case for suggesting that the term revitalist is perhaps the one which best captures the complexity and diversity of the Mahdiyya movement which, as was shown in chapter seven and elsewhere, passed through a number of stages and blended a number of orientations. However, for much of its history its concern was with coming to terms with change in a way that closely resembles Wallace's notion of a revitalization movement.[24]

According to Wallace such movements pass through several stages. Initially society is in a relatively "steady state", in that its cultural design or "mazeway" successfully orders its members lives. This, as chapter three showed, was the situation in Ijebuland prior to and for two decades or so after the introduction of colonial rule. The "steady state" was then shattered by colonialism and in particular the introduction of the "Sole Native Authority" system which more than anything else symbolised the end of the old dispensation: henceforth literacy and the skills that colonialism brought, and Christian belief and practice, would in principle decide everything from questions of leadership criteria to dress, diet, style of living, morality and ethics.

The "steady state" was then followed by disruption, disorientation and strife and this opened the way for the creation of a new system of ideas, values and symbolic forms, using Wallace's term, a new "mazeway", such as that conceived by Muhammad Jumat Imam, the most prominent and arresting symbol being the Mosjidi Zahiri or Temple of the New Jerusalem constructed, as noted above, in the style of a church and mosque and

representing the inauguration of the new "religion of the spirit" which would enable Muslims and Christians to worship together as one.

Also, like Wallace's revitalization movement, the Mahdiyya movement, as was seen in chapter seven, underwent a process of institutionalization already evident before the death of its founder and hastened along by the succession crisis, the demise of colonialism and the consequent abandonment of the "Sole Native Authority" system of indirect rule.

Now a new "steady state" was in the making, this time fashioned by the new politicians so as to be capable of subsuming without creating intolerably high levels of social tension and discord a complex and modern techno-social system. In the new dispensation of the post-independence era the "fury of innovation" would not be allowed to rage on uncontrolled; change, however disruptive, would be managed, the marginalised, the destitute, would be brought into the system and those who wanted to advance would be supported and encouraged.

But, as the persistence of the Mahdiyya, and the Maitatsine riots of the early 1980s discussed in chapter one, make clear, both quietistic and militant Mahdism continue to appeal and, as scholarly research shows, for much the same reasons as in colonial and pre-colonial times.[25]

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6. S. A. Arjomand, The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to the 1890, op. cit., p. 82.

7. Hodgkin, "Mahdism, Messianism and Marxism in the African Setting", op. cit., p. 100.

8. Ibid. p. 100.

9. Ibid. pp. 96 ff.

10. Cf: W. MacCaffey, Kongo Prophets, op. cit., J. D. Y. Peel, Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba, op. cit., and B. Sundkler, Bantu Prophets, op. cit.

11. Sundkler, Bantu Prophets in South Africa, op. cit., p.330.

12. Paden, Religion and Political Culture in Kano, op. cit., pp. 171-73.

13. Peel, Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba, op. cit., pp. 294-95 and passim.

14. Burridge, New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities, op. cit., p. 13.

15. Douglas, Natural Symbols, op. cit., pp. 77-92 and passim.

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18. Ibid.

19. Ibid. p. 148.

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24. A. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements", in American Anthropologist, Vol. 58, No.2, 1956, pp. 264-81.

25. On the causes of the Maitatsine riots see: A. Christellow, "The 'Yan Tatsine Disturbances in Kano - A Search for Perspective", The Muslim World, op. cit., pp. 69-84.

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